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ABSTRACT

Since the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative began in 1996, participation in the program's services had fallen short of the amount that research indicates is needed to improve literacy levels substantially. Efforts to improve student persistence and implement service enhancements were therefore initiated in 2000. A study of students' persistence in 5 of LILAA's 15 participating library literacy programs was undertaken around the same time. Key findings and conclusions of the persistence study were as follows: (1) support services (child care, transportation) proved the most difficult for the library literacy programs to implement; (2) students expressed two types of learning goals--specific "instrumental" goals that must be reached to realize longer-term aspirations and broader "transformational" goals that entail major life changes and libraries must acknowledge both types of student goals and build on them to motivate long-term participation; (3) students benefit from having several different type of sponsors/mentors (personal, intermediate, official); and (4) library literacy programs must preserve their caring, respectful, and

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personalized atmosphere while simultaneously emphasizing more intensive participation. (Twenty-two tables/figures are included. The following items are appended: descriptions of five libraries studied and the study samples; a discussion of issues related to capturing student persistence using attendance record data; and an overview of the persistence study's achievement study component. The bibliography lists 14 references.) (MN)

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# "As Long As It Takes"

## Responding to the Challenges of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

**John Comings**
**Sondra Cuban**
**Johannes M. Bos**
**Kristin E. Porter**

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# "As Long As It Takes"

## Responding to the Challenges of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

**John Comings**
**Sondra Cuban**
**Johannes M. Bos**
**Kristin E. Porter**
**with**
**Fred C. Doolittle**

**April 2003**

MDRC

**The Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative is supported by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and, with the support also of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, is being evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Harvard University.**

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# Overview

Research has shown that meaningful improvements in adult literacy require more than the annual average of about 70 hours that adult learners spend in organized literacy instruction. Low student persistence is therefore a critical issue for library literacy programs and other providers of adult education. In response, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds launched the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative in 1996. Of the fifteen participating libraries, five are the focus of the LILAA persistence study, which is being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. This interim report from the study examines the period, starting in 2000, during which the programs developed plans to improve student persistence and began to implement service enhancements.

### The Adult Learners and Their Initial Patterns of Participation

- As the initiative began, literacy test scores averaged near the third-grade level on assessments of reading, phonetic decoding, and comprehension and at the fifth-grade level on a vocabulary test. Native English speakers had lower average scores than those who were learning English.
- Participation in program services fell short of the amount that research indicates is needed to improve literacy levels substantially. Only two-thirds of entrants remained in the program after three months, and entrants averaged 57 hours of participation over 18 months.

### Early Implementation of Persistence Innovations

- LILAA's continued focus on improving student persistence shaped program behavior and stimulated a search for ways to achieve this goal, which had more significance than many of the innovations originally planned.
- Most of the literacy programs focused on improving instruction and on changing operational procedures, such as expanding program hours.
- Support services (such as child care and transportation assistance) were the most difficult innovation for the library literacy programs to implement.
- People who entered the programs in 2001 participated for more hours during their period of active participation than did their counterparts in 2000. But the length of active participation did not differ between the two years.

### Early Implementation Lessons

- Students expressed two types of learning goals: specific "instrumental" goals that must be reached in order to realize longer-term aspirations and broader "transformational" goals that entail major life changes, such as taking on a new social or work role. Literacy programs need to acknowledge and build on each type of goal to motivate long-term participation.
- Learners benefited from different types of sponsors — individuals who provided continuing encouragement and support. Library literacy programs could help students identify people who can play these roles, and they could support sponsors' efforts.
- Learners see library literacy programs as caring and respectful and, hence, as different from other educational or social service organizations. Library literacy programs need to preserve this personalized atmosphere while simultaneously emphasizing more intensive participation.

A final report, scheduled for the fall of 2003, will discuss key factors supporting and inhibiting participation in adult literacy programs, changes that the sites made to support student persistence more effectively, changes in student persistence as these reforms took effect, innovations that appear to be especially promising, and the relationship between participation in library literacy services and improved literacy skills. The final report will also explore how library literacy programs fit within the broader adult education system.

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# Preface

As the U.S. economy has changed, an increasing number of jobs have come to demand English literacy and communication skills. At the same time, millions of American adults cannot reap the rewards of literacy because their prior education was inadequate, they have learning problems, or they are in the process of learning English.

Many adult learners aiming to improve their language skills enroll in programs that provide literacy instruction, but research has shown that adult students generally do not participate long enough or intensely enough to achieve significant gains. In recent years, government funders of adult literacy programs have sought to change this pattern by requiring the programs that they fund to demonstrate positive effects on students' literacy skills.

Library-based programs are an important part of the network of organizations that serve adult literacy students. Libraries exist in most communities, are open to all, and provide a more inviting setting for adult learning than do other education institutions. Building on these natural advantages, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds launched the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative to help 15 library literacy programs around the country develop and implement new ways to increase adult learners' persistence and to test whether the new strategies lead to longer, more intense program participation and to improvements in literacy.

Five of the LILAA programs are the focus of the LILAA persistence study, which is being conducted for the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation in collaboration with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Given the well-established link between substantial program participation and literacy gains, this research takes a logical next step by focusing on efforts to improve adult learners' persistence. And by developing new ways to measure and analyze participation and identifying and fielding achievement tests suitable for adult literacy students, the study offers lessons and insights for other programs that seek to measure gains in participants' literacy skills.

This report presents interim findings from the LILAA persistence study that can help policymakers and program managers improve adult literacy services. It examines baseline participation levels, explores the experiences of different types of adult learners, describes the variety of innovations being tested in the LILAA programs, and discusses how to build strong relationships with adult learners as they begin to participate in a literacy program. A final report, scheduled for publication in the fall of 2003, will provide a fuller picture of the innovations that the LILAA programs implemented, examine how student participation changed over time, analyze whether and how literacy levels improved, and explore the implications of the findings for the broader adult education and literacy system.

Kent McGuire
Senior Vice President

# Acknowledgments

The research in this report seeks to tell the story of the adults who come to library literacy programs to improve their skills and the staff and volunteers who serve them. Thus, we owe particular gratitude to the many library literacy students who shared their stories with us and to the program staff who reported on their experiences, helped collect high-quality participation data, and reviewed an earlier draft of this report. We especially wish to thank the following program directors: Leslie Rodd and Norma Jones of Oakland Public Library, Bruce Carmel of Queens Borough (New York) Public Library, Kathy Endaya of Redwood City (California) Public Library, Ken English of New York Public Library, and Steve Sumerford of Greensboro (North Carolina) Public Library.

We also wish to thank the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and the U.S. Department of Education for their financial support of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) persistence study. Special acknowledgment is due Edward Pauly, Sheila Murphy, and Lee Mitgang of the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds for their insights on the LILAA initiative and for their valuable comments on an early draft of this report.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of our colleagues at the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). At MDRC, Judith Scott and Michele Beleu provided research assistance and report coordination; Joel Gordon helped with participation data collection; Robert Weber edited the report with assistance from Valerie Chase; and Stephanie Cowell did the word-processing. At NCSALL, Lauren Wedam provided technical research assistance with help from Rebecca Garland and Dominique Chlup; Rosalind Davidson trained the testers for the achievement study and offered guidance throughout the testing process; and John Strucker provided consultation and advice on the achievement study tests. We also wish to thank Lyn Verinsky for scoring the tests and the testers for administering them.

The Authors

# Executive Summary

Weak literacy skills can mean the difference between holding a job and being unemployed, can limit career choices, and can prevent people from participating in the civic life of their community. Research shows that meaningful improvements in adult literacy require a "threshold" level of participation in an adult literacy program; sporadic participation may well make little difference in literacy. Unfortunately, however, in a one-year period, most adult literacy students spend fewer than 70 hours engaged in organized literacy instruction. Given their low initial literacy levels, many would need more hours of instruction to make progress and several years of study to accomplish their literacy goals.

Many public libraries in the United States provide literacy services, and some provide direct instruction through individual tutoring, classes or small groups, and computer-assisted learning — often to students who have no other education options because of their low literacy skills. Concerns about low levels of student persistence have become a major policy and program issue for library literacy programs and other providers of adult education, especially as more federal funding has become contingent on showing student progress.

With a goal of addressing problems of student persistence, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds launched the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative in 1996 and contracted with the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy to study the effort. Of the fifteen libraries participating in the initiative, five are the focus of the LILAA persistence study. Each of these five libraries and their nine branch programs (described in Table ES.1) developed plans to improve student persistence, and they received funding from the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds to implement service enhancements in 2000. This report describes the adult learners who are served by the programs, analyzes initial patterns of learner persistence (in terms of both length and intensity) prior to the full implementation of program enhancements, and documents the early progress of these programs in implementing innovations to increase participation. Because this is the first study of its kind, the findings break new ground in many respects.

## Key Findings

### The Adult Learners and Their Initial Patterns of Participation

- **Overall, the literacy levels of students in the LILAA programs were low, and native English speakers, on average, achieved at lower levels than those who were learning English.**

**Table ES.1**

## The Five Libraries Participating in the LILAA Persistence Study

| Library | Number of Branches | Program Name/Units | Where Program Is Housed | Program Features |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greensboro (NC) Public Library | 9 | Part of Literacy 2000 | Chavis and Glenwood branches[a] | Chavis offers afternoon and evening GED classes and a computer lab. Glenwood offers small-group instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), one-on-one tutoring, and a computer lab. |
| New York Public Library | 85 | 9 Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs) in 3 boroughs | Fordham (Bronx), Wakefield (Bronx), and Seward Park (Manhattan) branches | Fordham serves 150 students with individual tutorials and in small groups and offers a computer lab for independent literacy self-instruction. Wakefield serves about 100 students, mostly of Afro-Caribbean origin, in small groups and computer self-study; offers jobs search resources. Seward Park serves a diverse group of 80 students in small-group tutoring. |
| Oakland (CA) Public Library | 19 | Second Start | Downtown office building near the library | Founded in 1984, the program offers classes and one-on-one tutoring through a mix of 150 volunteers in addition to professional staff; with 20 computers, offers computer-assisted instruction. |
| Queens Borough (NY) Public Library | 62 | 6 Adult Learning Centers (ALCs) | Central (Jamaica), Flushing, and Rochdale Village branches | Founded in 1977, the 6 ALCs enroll over 2,500 adults per year, offering ESOL and basic literacy instruction. |
| Redwood City (CA) Public Library | 3 | Project READ | Redwood City Public Library, with services in other community organizations, including schools, a jail, and a halfway house | More than 180 volunteers tutor approximately 200 adults one-on-one and in small groups; includes a learning disabilities program. Two-thirds of adult students are Hispanic. |

NOTE: [a]Quantitative data were collected only from the Glenwood program.

At the start of this study, 250 students took literacy tests, and a follow-up test was scheduled for one year later. Average initial scores ranged from near the third-grade level on assessments of reading, phonetic decoding, and comprehension to the fifth-grade level on a test of vocabulary. Average scores for students who were learning English exceeded average scores for native English speakers who were participating in adult basic education (ABE) programs, by one to three grade levels, depending on the test used. This difference may have arisen in part because the students learning English may have had stronger literacy skills in their native language. In any case, these low initial levels of literacy suggest that students need to participate in many hours of instruction over an extended period in order to achieve their literacy goals.

- **Adults participating in the LILAA programs all share one thing in common — a desire to improve their literacy skills — but in some other ways they are a diverse group, reflecting the variety of the communities served.**

The clientele of library literacy programs very much reflect the characteristics of their communities as well as local perceptions of the library programs and their services. The adult learners in these programs were almost entirely people of color (less than 5 percent were white), with each site drawing half or more of its students from a single racial or ethnic group. All the programs attracted students of a broad age range. Slightly more than one-third of students (36 percent) were between ages 21 and 35, and slightly more than one-third (36 percent) were between ages 36 and 50. Eight percent were younger than 21, and a full 20 percent were older than 50.

- **Prior to the implementation of program innovations, the length and intensity of students' participation in services fell short of the amount needed to improve literacy levels substantially.**

Prior to the full implementation of innovations to support student persistence, only two-thirds of the adults entering the programs participated at any level in the third month of follow-up. After this rapid early drop-off in participation, the participation rate continued to decline, gradually dropping to 28 percent in the twelfth month of follow-up and to 15 percent in the eighteenth month. Entrants averaged 57 hours of participation over 18 months, though in months when students were active, they averaged 7 hours of participation per month, or less than 2 hours per week.

There do not seem to be major systematic differences among learners by gender, but students over 36 years of age and those employed full time at entry tended to participate more. There are some differences across racial and ethnic groups, but these are intertwined with differences related to local program characteristics and communities, because groups tend to be clustered in specific sites. There are major differences in participation according to learners' primary mode of instruction; those primarily working with an individual tutor participated the

most, and those studying primarily in classroom settings participated the least. However, this effect could also be driven by local program differences (sites tended to emphasize a particular mode of instruction) or by differences in the characteristics of participants in each mode (because different students were attracted to different modes of learning).

- **Movements in and out of the program were frequent.**

Many students who stopped participating did so abruptly (without a gradual decline in hours), and about one-third of those who stopped participating for a month returned to the program in some later month. Maintaining contact with a program's currently inactive learners could be an important support to student persistence.

- **Students in these library literacy programs used the services in four different ways during the early phase of the LILAA initiative, suggesting that a range of programmatic responses may be needed to address low participation.**

Some adult literacy students are *intermittent participants* who join and leave a program several times. Breaks in participation are often caused by a personal crisis, and students return when the problem has passed. Programs should help these students maintain a connection during periods of inactivity and should welcome them back when they are able to resume participation. *Short-term students* participate intensely but briefly to accomplish a specific goal, such as admission to a training program or preparation for a citizenship test. Programs should help such learners identify long-term goals and other programs that they can use. *Long-term students* are active in programs for an extended period, often participating in computer-assisted instruction or self-study activities as well as tutoring and classes. For some, specific, realistic literacy goals can be developed, but others participate because it provides social interaction and a sense of community. *Mandatory participants* are required to attend a program as a condition of receiving some type of aid or to comply with conditions of parole. If these learners can identify goals of their own — related to but separate from the agency that referred them — this could help motivate them to participate more substantially.

- **Many adult learners face serious difficulties in other aspects of their lives, and these often hinder their efforts to participate steadily and intensely in literacy services.**

The adult learners in library literacy programs are almost entirely from low-income households, and a substantial minority may have undiagnosed learning disabilities that hamper their progress in the literacy program and in other aspects of their lives. They may also have health problems or histories of substance abuse that have prevented them from achieving steady employment. Those who are learning English may be relatively new to the United States, so-

cially isolated, and struggling to acclimate themselves to a new culture. Some have been in abusive family relationships and have not received emotional support in their efforts to improve their literacy skills.

These patterns of participation illustrate the importance of the LILAA initiative and the need to create broad-based interventions that extend and deepen engagement in program literacy activities. Given most adult learners' low levels of literacy, they will make only slow progress in meeting their literacy goals with the amount of participation that was reported in the early stages of the LILAA initiative.

## Early Implementation of Persistence Innovations

The LILAA persistence study involves a focus on student persistence and the implementation of specific innovations in four categories: *information gathering* to learn more about students and developments in the adult literacy field, *instructional improvements* to make instructional techniques more engaging and useful, *operational changes* to reform program procedures and make the services more accessible, and *support services* to help students overcome personal and social barriers to persistence.

- **In the initial implementation phase, the LILAA initiative's continued focus on improving student persistence shaped local programs' behavior, and the resulting search for ways to achieve this goal had more significance than many of the specific innovations that were originally planned.**

During the initial implementation phase, from January 2000 to June 2001, some planned interventions were dropped or delayed, while others moved ahead and new ones emerged. The constant during this period was the emphasis within the LILAA project on increased student persistence, both as a goal to be sought and as an operational indicator of student progress to be tracked.

- **Information that the programs collected at the start of the initiative concerning students' needs and perspectives and alternative program approaches did not lead to major changes in local plans for reform; most sites focused on their existing plans for innovations.**

As part of the LILAA persistence study, programs were expected to collect information from participants about their needs, the barriers they faced to more intensive participation, and their ideas about how to improve program services. The findings from this data collection effort — following the model of action research — were to be used in the design of subsequent interventions. In most cases, the information gathering was done more slowly than originally envi-

sioned. Programs typically began to move forward with new interventions before completing efforts to fully document and formally analyze the participants' perspectives on possible improvements, though, in some cases, information was used to justify changes already under way or to refine and add new strategies.

- **Throughout the initial implementation period, the literacy programs focused mostly on improving instruction and changing operational procedures.**

Instructional innovations included improved student orientations and tutor training, new ways to build more effectively on learners' goals, new methods of delivering literacy services (for example, through enhanced computer labs or new methods of group instruction), and clearer standards for instruction to ensure that each student received services meeting a minimum threshold of adequacy. Operational strategies involved changing and expanding program hours. These enhancements aimed to improve the direct services in library literacy programs.

- **Support services were the most difficult innovation for the library literacy programs to implement.**

Some adult learners arrived at the literacy program needing multiple support services. Because library literacy programs could not directly offer all the needed supports (such as child care, counseling, health services, transportation assistance) even if they wished to, efforts to enhance such offerings were dependent on the cooperation of other agencies, many of which were already hard-pressed to meet the demand for their services. In addition, some libraries were hesitant to take on the responsibility of addressing the support needs of adult learners, out of concern that this could be a "slippery slope" pulling them into the role of a social service provider and diverting them from the core mission of improving literacy. Their reluctance was also connected to the long-term costs of such services and to worries about not being able to continue services to students in need. Finally, some library staff members were concerned about the equity of providing special support services to learners in literacy programs when other library patrons might have as great a need for such assistance.

- **Data collection and reporting on students' characteristics and participation improved over time, though the problems encountered may herald difficulties to be faced as federal reporting requirements increase.**

At the outset of the persistence study, the library literacy programs had varied experiences in data collection; some were able to meet the project's requirements with only modest adjustments, while others needed substantial help in making changes. As part of the initial implementation phase, the programs built new data collection systems or enhanced existing ones and were able to provide information about learners' background characteristics and hours of

participation. However, these improvements required new commitments of staff time for data collection and reporting, which in this case were supported by special project funding. In addition, the data collection effort raised concerns about confidentiality, because some staff saw it as contrary to traditional library values, which hold that patrons can use services as they wish, without fear that anyone is monitoring their activities.

- **As the program innovations begin to take hold, there are some signs of an encouraging trend in the intensity of participation among students who are active in the programs.**

It is premature to judge whether the program interventions will increase learner persistence, but there are early suggestions of encouraging trends in the intensity of participation among active students. Those who entered a library literacy program in 2001 participated for more hours while active than their counterparts who entered in 2000. However, the percentage of students who remained active over time did not increase. Further analysis of these trends will be a focus of the final report.

## Early Implementation Lessons

At this early stage in program implementation, the lessons from the LILAA persistence study center on key challenges in developing a strong initial connection with adult learners and on promising approaches that are suggested by the initial year's experience.

- **Adult learners expressed two types of goals, and literacy programs need to find ways to acknowledge and build on each of these.**

Many literacy students may have specific goals, such as passing the General Educational Development (GED) examination or an occupational test, reading job-related material more quickly and accurately, or reading stories to a young child. Such *instrumental goals* can motivate many adult learners to participate in a literacy program. But some students may also express broader goals that may initially strike program staff as unfocused or unrealistic. Underlying these *transformational goals* may be a profound desire to improve the conditions of one's life, to expand one's repertoire of skills, or to change one's social identity. Aspirations like these can also be a motivator of long-term participation in a program, especially if they can be linked to intermediate objectives. Literacy programs should seek ways to tap into such aspirations, and initial efforts at goal-setting should not be restricted in ways that might exclude or devalue these more nebulous but still-important student goals.

- **Learners benefited from different types of sponsors — individuals who provided continuing encouragement and support. Literacy programs**

**could help students identify people who can play these roles and could support sponsors' efforts.**

Because most adult learners face many challenges outside the literacy program, problems may interrupt participation, and disappointments may undermine motivation. Early experience in the persistence study suggests that students can benefit from different types of sponsors. *Personal sponsors* are often family members or close friends who have a long-term relationship with a student and can provide continuing emotional, literacy, and informational support. *Intermediate sponsors* typically play a supportive role through a student's participation in a religious, social, self-help, or educational institution. *Official sponsors* are professionals such as social workers, welfare case managers, literacy staff members, or parole officers who are providing intermittent, targeted institutional support to students. Library literacy programs can assist students in identifying individuals and organizations to serve in sponsoring roles and can aid sponsors in their efforts.

- **Learners see library literacy programs as caring and respectful and, hence, as different from other educational or social service organizations with which they are involved. Library literacy programs need to preserve this personalized atmosphere while simultaneously emphasizing more intensive participation.**

Directors of the LILAA programs reported that many students were demoralized by the feeling that schools or other program providers did not treat them with respect or strive to meet their needs. In response, and noting that many students are members of minority groups, directors have attempted to create a climate that — unlike mainstream institutions — reflects students' cultural experiences and values. Many students report that libraries feel different, offering them a caring and respectful setting in which to improve their literacy skills and express themselves. At the same time, the LILAA initiative and the early experience in the first program year support the need to strengthen instruction, provide cultural diversity training to tutors, and build a community that is open and communicative. Libraries should be careful to preserve their existing atmosphere as they work to strengthen these aspects of literacy programs.

## Implications of the Findings for the Project

This initial research has also highlighted several key themes that cut across the literacy programs in the LILAA persistence study. At times in this report, findings challenge both the stereotypical views of what "all" literacy programs and students look like and the contention that all programs are different because of unique local circumstances. Future research will continue to explore both the diversity of programs and people and the patterns of circumstances and behavior. In addition, the research will continue to explore whether and how library literacy programs have come to understand the attractions of participation for students and the barriers

they face and have crafted effective strategies to increase the benefits and reduce the costs of participation.

The findings of this interim report set the stage for further analysis to be presented in a final report scheduled for the fall of 2003. That report will focus on five questions:

1. *What are the key factors supporting and inhibiting participation in adult literacy programs?* What are the implications of these factors for the design of strategies to improve learner persistence?

2. *Over time, how did the sites in the persistence study change their operations to support student persistence more effectively?* What innovations were strengthened or put in place during the second and third year of the initiative? What operational lessons emerged as programs worked to support improved persistence?

3. *As the reforms took effect, did student persistence improve over time?* Did learners who entered the LILAA programs during this later period persist longer or participate more intensely? Were there differences among types of students? Were there differences across the sites?

4. *Are there types of innovations that appear to be especially promising as ways to improve student persistence?* What efforts and resources were needed to put these innovations in place? What are the implications for future program design and operations?

5. *What is the relationship between participation in library literacy services and improved literacy skills?* What were the gains in literacy achievement test scores between the initial testing of students and a follow-up test? Did students who participated more in services show greater gains? Were there types of students who showed especially strong gains? Who showed little or no gains? What are the implications for program design?

The upcoming research will also explore how library literacy programs fit within the broader adult education system.

Each of these questions breaks new ground for program operations and research on adult literacy. The answers will help program operators and funders more effectively serve adults who face serious barriers to full participation in the nation's economy and civic life.

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

## Participation in Library Literacy Programs

The growing importance of communication and information technology in the U.S. economy has increased the need for literacy and math skills, even at jobs that previously required little education or training. Weak literacy skills can mean the difference between holding a job and not being able to find or keep one and can prevent people from participating in their community's civic life. Many public libraries in the United States provide a range of literacy services, often to students who have no other education options. Because libraries are permanent community institutions with diverse resources, they are in a unique position to address a wide range of educational and support needs of adult literacy students and their families.

A primary reason why adult students participate in library literacy programs is to achieve meaningful improvements in literacy skills. But the acquisition of literacy skills is not a simple, predictable process, in which one extra hour of study results in a specific measurable gain in literacy skills. Instead, research shows that meaningful improvements in adult literacy require a certain "threshold" level of participation in literacy programs.[1]

Unfortunately, participation in literacy programs is only one of many competing demands and activities facing adult students, and most adult students spend fewer than 70 hours annually in organized instruction[2] — far short of the intensity needed to truly progress. Concerns about low levels of student persistence have become a major policy and program issue for library literacy programs and other providers of adult education, especially as more federal funding becomes contingent on showing student progress.[3]

## The LILAA Persistence Study

The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds launched the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative in 1996 to help 15 U.S. libraries improve their literacy services, and it contracted with the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy to study the effort. As identified in Box 1.1 and more fully described in Appendix A, five of these libraries are the focus of the LILAA persistence

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[1]See, for example, Bos, Scrivener, Snipes, and Hamilton, 2002.

[2]Young, Morgan, Fitzgerald, and Fleishman (1994) reported that adult student in federally supported programs spent an average of 58 hours annually in organized instruction, though recent unpublished figures suggest that this might have risen to around 70 hours.

[3]See, for example, "Measures and Methods for the National Reporting System for Adult Education" (2001).

study. This is the third of four reports from the study examining strategies that library literacy programs have undertaken to increase learner persistence, lessons emerging from this effort, and results of these persistence strategies for adult students.[4] The study seeks to:

- Clearly define the concept of learner persistence
- Develop better tools for measuring persistence
- Foster a deeper understanding of the barriers to persistence and the supports that can enhance it
- Evaluate approaches for supporting greater persistence

One of the goals of the LILAA persistence study is to move beyond simple characterizations of library literacy programs and the students they serve to illustrate the diversity of settings, services, and students and to explore the implications of this variety. At times, discussions of library literacy programs imply a "sameness" across programs and people that hides both strengths and challenges. In contrast, this report — in its program descriptions, profiles of people, and analysis of participation — seeks to move beyond aggregate discussions and to present this research project as starting to chart a middle ground between the statements "Everyone and every program is the same" and "Everyone and every program is unique." The goal is to use disaggregation to clarify policy and practice issues and opportunities and to identify subcategories of program strategies and participants for which there are common themes and lessons.

This report describes the initial experiences of library literacy programs as they launched new efforts to enhance learner persistence. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 defines the challenges of increasing persistence by discussing the adult learners served by the programs in this study and their initial levels of literacy and service participation as LILAA programs began to introduce new strategies to increase persistence. Chapter 3 focuses on the early efforts of programs to introduce new strategies, discussing approaches that were successfully introduced during this early period and new ideas that emerged, as well as strategies that — at this point — have not been put in place. Chapter 4 explores early lessons related to the challenges that learners face and the strategies that libraries have employed to increase persistence. The focus of Chapter 4 — given the stage of the project — is on lessons for creating and maintaining a strong connection with learners as they begin participating in a literacy program.

The final report on the project, to be completed in 2003, will describe program implementation in the second year of the initiative, examine whether learner persistence increased

[4]For early descriptions of the initiative and the participating libraries, see Comings and Cuban (2000); Comings, Cuban, Bos, and Taylor (2001).

during the period of the initiative, explore links between the strategies put in place to increase persistence and the observed changes, and analyze the extent to which program participation is linked to improved literacy (as measured by a battery of standardized literacy tests).

**Box 1.1**

**The Five Libraries Participating in the LILAA Persistence Study**

**Greensboro (North Carolina) Public Library's** literacy programs evolved from a community effort to address the needs of adults with low literacy skills. This resulted in Literacy 2000, a collaborative plan supported by the library, the community college, Reading Connections (a nonprofit agency supporting one-on-one tutoring), and community agencies. Literacy programs that started through Literacy 2000 are located at two of Greensboro Public Library's nine branches, Glenwood and Chavis.

**New York Public Library** (NYPL) has helped immigrants assimilate into the local community for more than a century. Nine of the 85 branches of the NYPL provide literacy services through their Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs), which target adults at the lowest levels of literacy. The CRWs still serve many new immigrants, but the focus of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI) is currently on literacy for English-speaking adults. The LILAA persistence study is focused on three of the CRWs: Fordham and Wakefield in the Bronx and Seward Park in Manhattan.

**Oakland Public Library's** Second Start adult literacy program, started in 1984, is a small, community-based program with both classroom instruction and one-on-one tutoring. Housed in a downtown office building, Second Start's multiethnic staff offer instruction in math, writing, and spelling as well as a program for stress reduction. Second Start also offers a computer-assisted literacy program, with approximately 20 computers.

**Queens Borough Public Library** is among the nation's oldest and largest library systems and serves one of the most diverse populations. The adult literacy program, founded in 1977, has its roots in the earlier library-based programs that provided education to immigrants. Six of the library's 62 branches support Adult Learning Centers (ALCs), which enroll more than 2,500 [illegible]ts each year, and three of these branches that have ALCs are included in the LILA[illegible] persistence study: Central, Flushing, and Rochdale Village.

**Redwood City (California) Public Library's** Project READ serves approximately 200 adults who have low literacy skills. More than 180 volunteers tutor these adults in both one-on-one settings and small groups. Two-thirds of the students are Hispanic, and many do not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Project READ serves a variety of other populations, including children and teens, adults in a local jail, and students in a Special Needs program for students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 2

# Defining the Challenges of Improving Student Persistence

The program participants in the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative are adults from diverse backgrounds who seek to improve their literacy skills for a variety of reasons and who have a number of different goals. Some are recent immigrants who are literate in their native language but want to increase their English fluency. Others do not have a high school diploma and want to prepare for the General Educational Development (GED) exam, designed to provide the equivalent of a high school credential. Still others may find that their low literacy level is a barrier to success in today's job market. These students may choose library literacy programs over other adult education programs because they cannot find other literacy instruction that is appropriate at their low literacy levels, because they benefit from the wide range of services provided by the libraries, or because they prefer the libraries' instructional approach over the methods used in more traditional educational settings. Many of the participants live in the communities near where the public libraries are located.

The challenges of improving student persistence arise out of the difficult lives of these adults, their existing levels of literacy and program participation, and their personal goals. This chapter begins by introducing the students in the nine library literacy programs during the first two years of the LILAA initiative, from January 2000 through December 2001. It presents some basic characteristics of these adult learners, discusses their literacy levels, and sheds light on students' views of their own literacy and literacy learning. Next, it presents the existing levels and patterns of persistence among these adult students. Drawing on attendance records from each of the library literacy programs, the analyses presented here are groundbreaking for the adult literacy field, providing a reliable baseline about student persistence for the first time. The chapter concludes with case studies that illustrate various patterns of persistence by describing individuals' experiences in the literacy programs and the life circumstances that affect their persistence.

## Who Are the Program Participants?

### Characteristics of LILAA Program Participants

The adult learners in the LILAA programs all share one thing in common — a desire to improve their literacy skills — but in some other ways they are a diverse group, reflecting the

variety of the communities served.[1] As Table 2.1 shows, the programs tend to serve more women than men, with only Oakland having fewer women (45 percent) than men. In the other programs, the percentage of women ranges from 53 percent in Greensboro[2] to 70 percent in Flushing (Queens Borough Public Library). Although the programs attract students of all ages (the youngest in the sample was 15, and the oldest 100), people between ages 20 and 50 predominate. A later discussion suggests that there may be differences in the ways that younger and older adults use the library literacy programs.

Students' race and ethnicity vary substantially across the programs, largely reflecting the communities in which they are situated. For example, at Oakland's Second Start program, students are predominantly African-American (78 percent); Redwood City's students are predominantly Hispanic (78 percent); and Flushing's students are predominantly Asian (69 percent). Overall, 42.5 percent of the students served by the programs in the LILAA study are black (including African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and a small number of Africans); 25.3 percent are Hispanic; 23.4 percent are Asian; and the remaining 8.8 percent are either white or of another race or ethnicity.

Slightly more than half the students who provided employment information were not employed when they entered the program.[3] Across the programs, the percentage who were employed at program entry ranged from 22 percent to 63 percent, illustrating that some programs may face different challenges in increasing the persistence of working adults. More students were employed full time than part time, with the percentage of full-time employees at program entry ranging from 16 percent to 54 percent.[4] As the later discussion of persistence shows, however, employed learners do not participate less than those without a job at program entry, suggesting they may have other characteristics that support their literacy learning.

### Literacy Levels of LILAA Program Participants

The students at the LILAA programs tend to have very low literacy skills. For many, the level of their literacy skills is below that needed for other adult education options, for access to job training opportunities, and for many jobs. Many are not able to read to their children or to help with the children's homework. And for many of these students, limited literacy skills affect their ability to be well-educated consumers, active citizens, and informed voters.

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[1]See Appendix B for a full description of the various samples used in the analyses. It is very likely that the programs served more students than those for whom data are available; as discussed in Appendix C, it is extremely challenging to accurately track every student.

[2]Greensboro data were collected only from the Glenwood branch.

[3]About 75 percent of the 4,000 students provided this information. The percentages reported in the text are for those who provided employment information.

[4]The programs do not update the employment status of their students after enrollment.

The LILAA Persistence Study

## Table 2.1

## Demographic Characteristics of All Program Participants, January 2000 Through December 2001

| Outcome | All | Greensboro | New York | | | Oakland | Queens Borough | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Fordham | Seward Park | Wakefield | | Central | Flushing | Rochdale Village | Redwood City |
| Gender (%) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 41.1 | 47 | 44 | 42 | 46 | 55 | 40 | 30 | 36 | 33 |
| Female | 58.9 | 53 | 56 | 58 | 54 | 45 | 60 | 70 | 64 | 67 |
| Age group (%) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Under 21 | 8.2 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 8 | 10 |
| 21 - 35 | 35.5 | 52 | 36 | 41 | 30 | 28 | 36 | 29 | 31 | 32 |
| 36 - 50 | 36.2 | 27 | 37 | 31 | 30 | 44 | 37 | 39 | 36 | 49 |
| 51 - 65 | 15.3 | 8 | 14 | 16 | 21 | 16 | 15 | 19 | 19 | 9 |
| Over 65 | 4.8 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 6 | 1 |
| Average age (years) | 39.0 | 34.3 | 37.9 | 37.7 | 40.2 | 40.0 | 38.1 | 43.8 | 40.7 | 36.3 |
| Ethnicity (%) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Black | 42.5 | 15 | 50 | 16 | 83 | 78 | 60 | 3 | 88 | 10 |
| Hispanic | 25.3 | 62 | 38 | 20 | 11 | 6 | 16 | 20 | 2 | 78 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 23.4 | 17 | 3 | 57 | 2 | 4 | 10 | 69 | 1 | 4 |
| White | 4.4 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 7 |
| Other | 4.4 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 11 | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| Employment status[a] (%) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Full time | 29.5 | 54 | 34 | 21 | 30 | 16 | 43 | 22 | 30 | - |
| Part time | 15.4 | 9 | 12 | 22 | 19 | 6 | 16 | 19 | 11 | - |
| Not employed | 55.1 | 37 | 54 | 57 | 51 | 78 | 42 | 59 | 59 | - |
| Sample size | 4,026 | 495 | 652 | 403 | 360 | 314 | 594 | 714 | 252 | 242 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data.

NOTES: Sample includes all students who participated at least once between January 2000 and December 2001.
Missing values were exluded from these calculations.

[a]Due to a high number of missing values, the distribution of employment statuses could not be tabulated for Redwood City.

As part of the LILAA initiative, 250 students in five of the nine LILAA programs took literacy tests.[5] While this sample is not random and includes students who have been participating in literacy services prior to testing, the students illustrate much of the breadth of the LILAA adult learner population. Figure 2.1 presents students' scores for three of the four literacy tests administered to adult learners, while the scores for the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) — a test only for non-English speakers — are discussed separately. The figure presents either a grade-level or an age-level equivalent score for each of the tests. Most of the students tested scored at very low literacy levels, whether illustrated by the distribution of their scores as shown in Figure 2.1 or by the score of the average student. There is substantial variability among the test-takers' performance levels on these tests, as indicated by relatively high standard errors for all the tests and by average scores that are strongly influenced by high scores for a small percentage of test-takers.

For the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), which measures vocabulary skills, the average score among the learners who successfully completed the test was the age-level equivalent of 10.4 years (approximately the fifth grade). For the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE), the average standardized score for the reading comprehension components, 3.2, translates to the equivalent of slightly below a fourth-grade reading level. And for the Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE), a test of reading rate and word recognition, the majority of students scored at or below the third-grade level on the two subtests, with the average student scoring at a grade level of 2.9 for the Sight Word Efficiency (SWE) subtest and at a grade level of 2.6 for the Phonemic Decoding Efficiency (PDE) subtest. All three of these tests signify very low levels on a variety of literacy skills.

For those who took the BEST (students in English for Speakers of Other Languages, or ESOL, programs), the mean score of 61 translates to a level 6 on a scale of 10 student-ability levels developed by the Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) project (not shown in Figure 2.1). Level 6 signifies the ability to satisfy most basic survival needs, including routine work and social demands. It also typically means that the test-taker can follow simple oral and written instructions in both familiar and unfamiliar settings and can communicate with native

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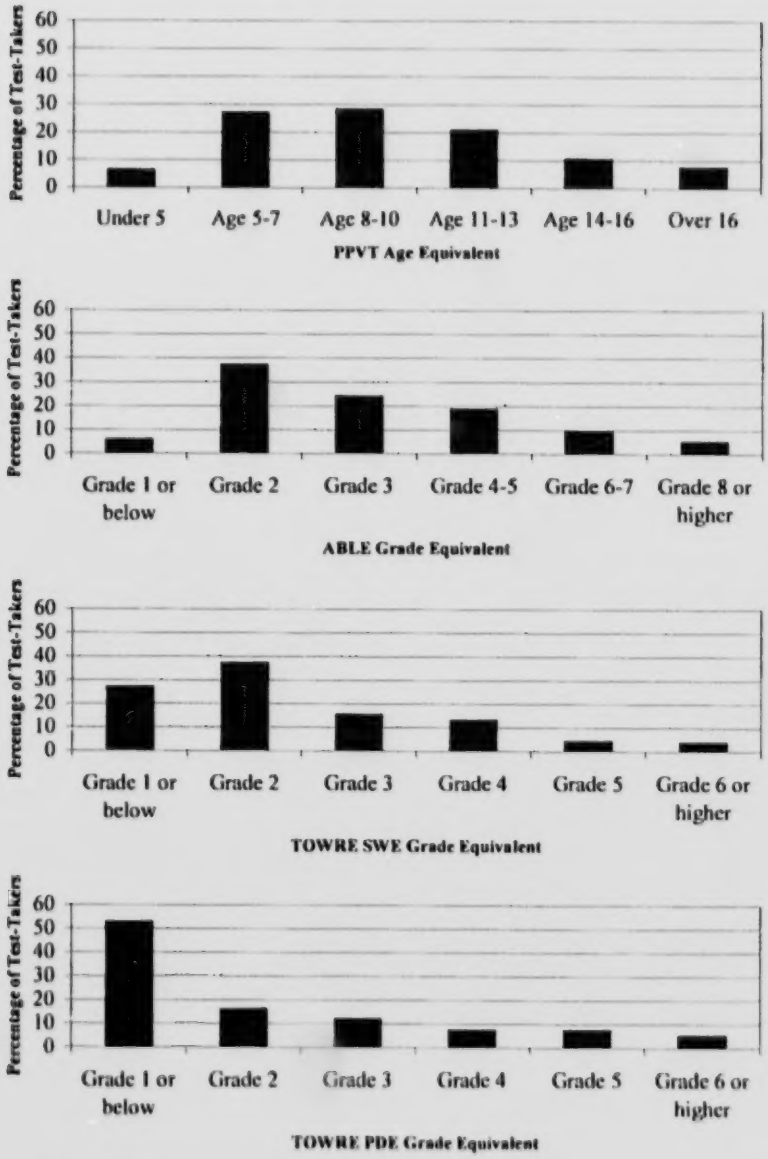
[5]Participating students were sampled from the Central and Flushing branches of Queens Borough Public Library, the Fordham branch of New York Public Library, Oakland Public Library, and Redwood City Public Library. These programs were chosen because their instruction includes adult basic education (ABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and because they represent a variety of demographic characteristics, types of instructional formats, and student population sizes. The literacy levels indicated by the scores measure the abilities of students in the programs, rather than their abilities on entering a program; those participating in the testing have been engaged in literacy activities at a LILAA program for varying amounts of time. For more information about the achievement study and the battery of tests being used, see Appendix D.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.1**

**Literacy Test Age/Grade Equivalents**




SOURCE: LILAA Achievement Study Database.

NOTES: Sample sizes varied between the tests, from 192 to 241.

Half the respondents were between ages 34 and 52; a quarter were older, and a quarter were younger.

English speakers who are not used to dealing with those whose English is limited.[6] A chart explaining the competencies associated with all 10 student-ability levels and how BEST scores relate to them can also be found in Appendix D.

As shown in Figure 2.2, English language learners performed significantly higher than the English speakers on two of the literacy tests. This may seem surprising at first, but there are several likely reasons for this pattern. The initial levels of literacy among ESOL students may be higher because many of them already have substantial literacy skills and formal education in their own language.[7] They may, therefore, be able to transfer their word recognition, decoding, and reading comprehension skills to their English learning, unlike English-speaking ABE learners, who have not developed these basic skills. In addition, their schooling may have focused on reading and writing academic English, with less attention being paid to their verbal abilities. Finally, because the test scores already capture some of the effects of students' program participation, the higher scores recorded by English learners may suggest that their literacy skills increase more quickly as they participate in these programs.

### Students' Perceptions of Their Literacy Skills and Gains

The students who participated in the achievement study also took a short survey answering questions about how they assessed their own reading skills and improvements in literacy.[8] Interestingly, the students did not necessarily see themselves as having very low literacy skills, ranking themselves as 5.5, on average, on a scale of 10.[9] Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 2.3, students reported difficulty in pronouncing and spelling words, understanding hard words, and understanding what they read overall. They do see benefits from participating in a literacy program; as shown in Figure 2.4, they see improvements particularly in their reading comprehension and in their ability to deal with difficult words.

## What Were the Early Patterns of Persistence Among LILAA Participants?

For students in literacy programs to succeed, they must find activities that fit their schedule and address their goals, remain active and participate on a regular basis, and overcome

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[6]Center for Applied Linguistics, 1989.

[7]In one of the LILAA programs, foreign-born college students and their spouses make up a significant portion of the adult learners.

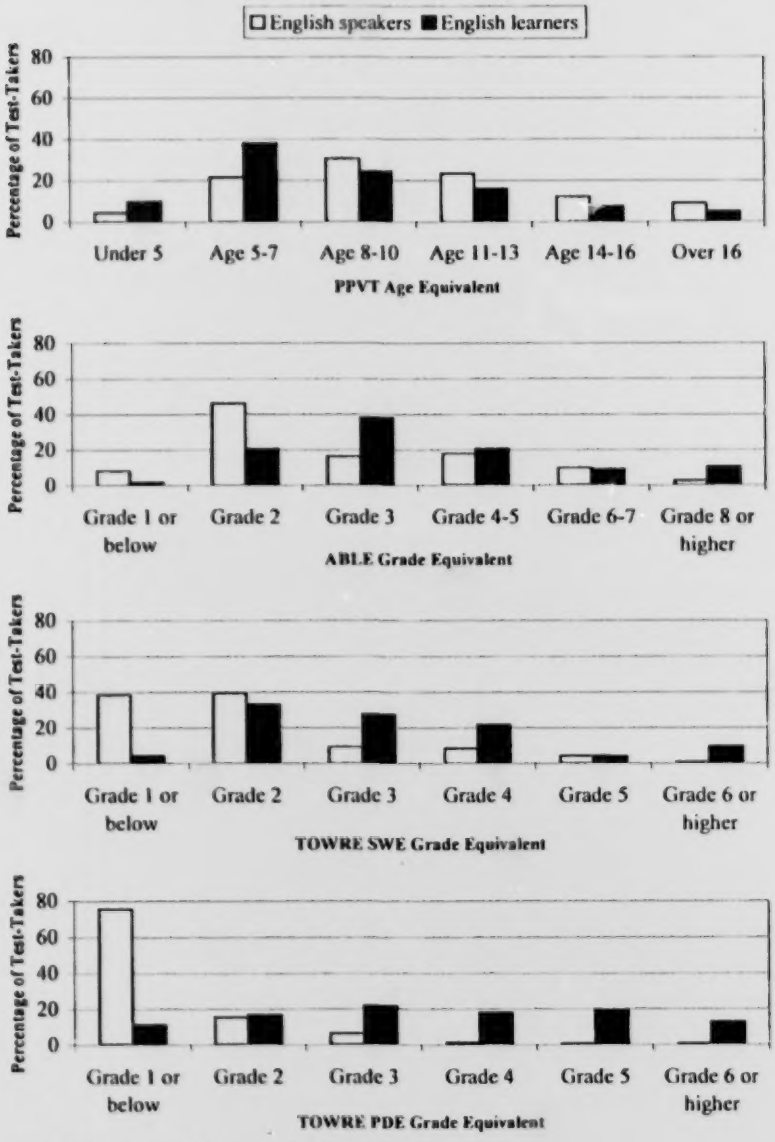
[8]This survey, developed by the team of qualitative researchers at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, drew and modified some questions from the "Interviewer Questionnaire from the Adult Reading Component Study," by John Strucker and Rosalind Davidson (NCSALL, Forthcoming, 2003).

[9]This is consistent with findings nationally that there is a discrepancy between self-perception of literacy skills and tested literacy skill levels (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993).

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.2**

**Literacy Test Age/Grade Equivalents for English Speakers and English Learners**




SOURCE: LILAA Achievement Study Database.

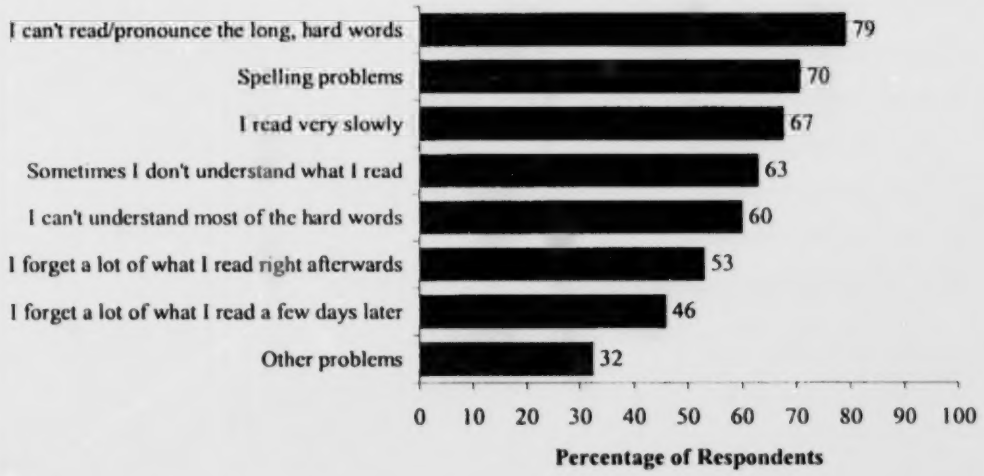
NOTES: Sample sizes varied between the tests, from 192 to 241.

Half the respondents were between ages 34 and 52; a quarter were older, and a quarter were younger.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.3**

**Literacy Survey Responses:**
**"What do you find hard about reading?"**

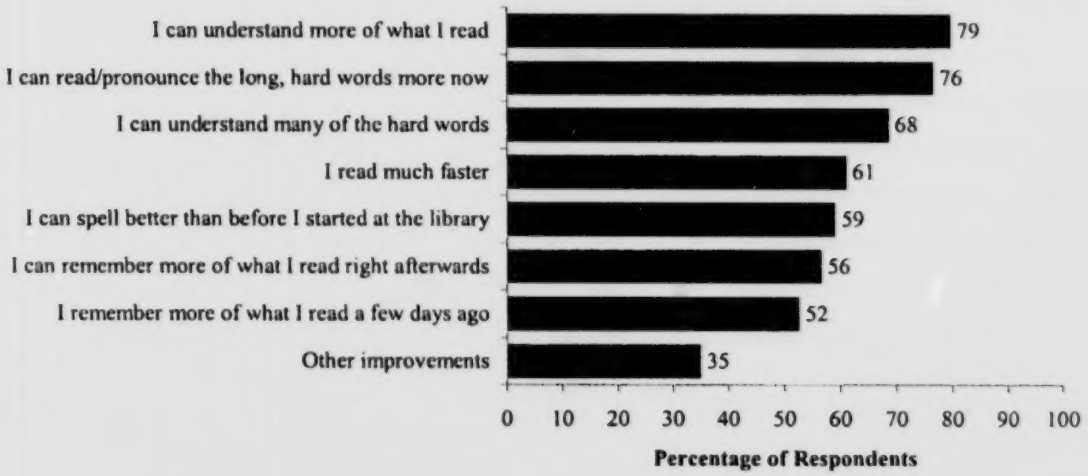

I can't read/pronounce the long, hard words
79
Spelling problems
70
I read very slowly
67
Sometimes I don't understand what I read
63
I can't understand most of the hard words
60
I forget a lot of what I read right afterwards
53
I forget a lot of what I read a few days later
46
Other problems
32
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Percentage of Respondents

SOURCE: Survey of 199 LILAA achievement study participants.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.4**

**Literacy Survey Responses:**
**"What do you find easier now than before you entered this program?"**


I can understand more of what I read
79
I can read/pronounce the long, hard words more now
76
I can understand many of the hard words
68
I read much faster
61
I can spell better than before I started at the library
59
I can remember more of what I read right afterwards
56
I remember more of what I read a few days ago
52
Other improvements
35
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Percentage of Respondents

SOURCE: Survey of 199 LILAA achievement study participants.

barriers and distractions that could interfere with their ability to persist. What were the existing patterns of persistence among participants as the LILAA programs began to evaluate students' barriers to persistence and to implement interventions aimed at addressing those barriers? In a sense, what was the baseline level of participation? Do adult learners use library literacy programs in different ways? Is there variation in participation for key subgroups of students served by the LILAA programs?

As Chapter 1 discussed, available research suggests that there is a threshold of participation that adult learners must meet before they are likely to make substantial gains in literacy. Defining persistence is not simple, but measures of students' participation in terms of *how long* (the duration of their participation in the program) and *how much* (their total hours of activity) capture key aspects of this threshold.[10]

### How Long Did Students Participate in the Library Programs?

Students who entered a LILAA program were most likely to stop participating in the first three months; of all entering students who were active for one month, 77 percent participated in the next month, and about two-thirds participated in the third month. Figure 2.5 shows how long students who entered the LILAA programs in the first year of this study participated in program activities. The horizontal axis identifies months *relative to* students' entry into the programs (rather than calendar months),[11] while the vertical axis identifies the percentage of these students who were active for at least one hour in the various months of follow-up.

After the first three months, average participation rates declined more slowly, partly because students who made it through the first several months were more likely to remain engaged and partly because some who stopped participating in earlier months returned. In fact, as is discussed later in this section, more than a third of entering students who dropped out at some point in the 18-month follow-up period used in this analysis subsequently returned to their programs. However, despite these returns, the average participation rate continued to decline over

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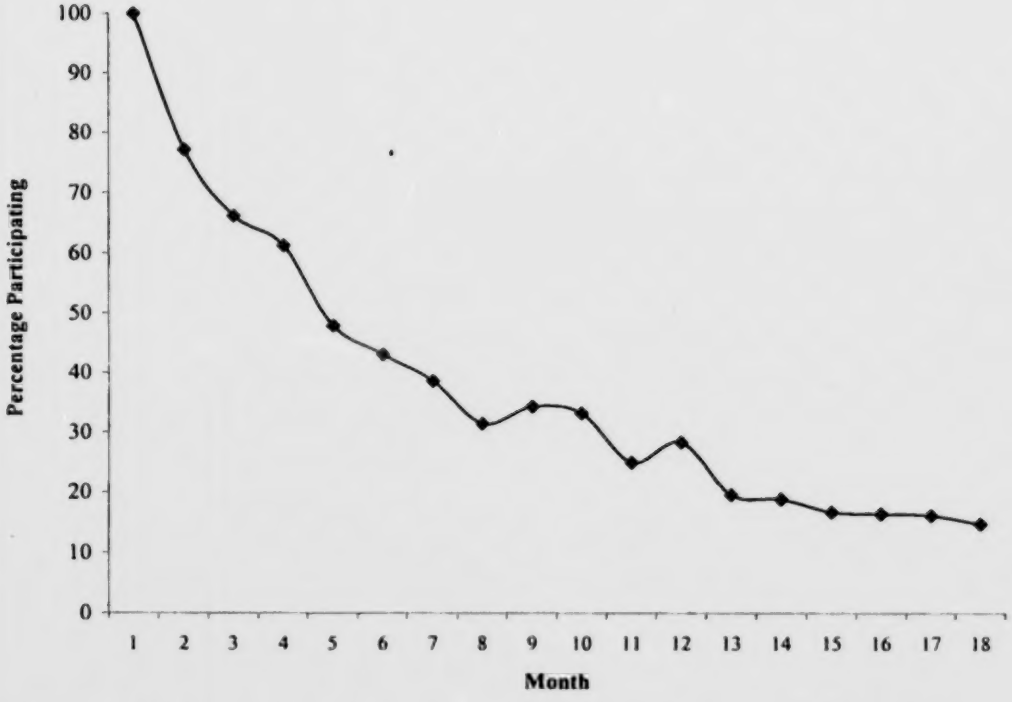
[10]These measures do not capture all aspects of student work. For example, they do not capture the persistence of students who leave a LILAA program to pursue further education elsewhere. Nor do they capture literacy activities done on students' own time or any activities not tracked in the libraries' data systems. The findings presented here are based on the *program entrant short follow-up sample* (n = 2,110) and the *program entrant extended follow-up sample* (n =1,256), described in Appendix B. A discussion of these definitions, other data issues, and the limitations of participation data can be found in Appendix C. Students are included in the entrant sample if they begin participation after a period of three months or more without program activity. Some who fit this definition have participated in the program in the past and, therefore, are more properly called "reentrants."

[11]Thus, Month 1 is the first month of participation in the program; Month 2 is the month following program entry; and so forth. Other figures in this chapter follow the same pattern.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.5**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The month of follow-up is defined relative to the student's first month of participation; thus, Month 1 is the month that the student entered the program, Month 2 is the month following program entry, and so on. Month 1 could be a different calendar month for different students.

time. By the end of the first year of follow-up, less than 30 percent of the program entrants were still active, and, by Month 18, this number had shrunk to 15 percent.

These initial findings highlight the importance of establishing a strong connection with learners during the first months after they enter a program. Some of these early departures may reflect the decisions of learners, who soon realize that these programs do not fit their needs and seek literacy instruction elsewhere. These are the *short-term participants* discussed later in this chapter. However, the findings also suggests that stemming the rapid decline in participation is an important aspect of improving persistence. Several of the enhancements discussed in Chapter 3 and the early lessons posed in Chapter 4 aim to build a stronger initial connection with these learners. The high frequency of returning learners (about one-third of those who leave) also highlights the importance of methods to maintain contact with *intermittent students* (discussed later in this chapter) and to encourage them to "try again" when circumstances permit. *Long-term participants* are also represented in this sample, with 15 percent of entrants still attending some activities 18 months after they enrolled in the program.

### How Often Did Students Leave and Return to a Program?

As shown in Table 2.2, nearly all program entrants (94.7 percent) left their program for at least one month within the 18-month follow-up period, and this percentage did not vary greatly across the sites. On average, entering students remained active 5.1 months before initially dropping out.[12] About one-third (36 percent) of those who stopped participating for at least a month subsequently returned to the program at some point within the 18 months of follow-up. The longer students were away, the less likely they were to return. Only 20.1 percent of students who were gone for two months or more ever returned; after six months, this percentage dropped to 6.2 percent. The average length of the gap between dropping out and then returning was 2.5 months, but in more than half of all cases (54.6 percent), the time between leaving and returning was just one month (not shown in table).[13]

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[12]However, the median time of initial participation was four months (not shown in table), indicating that the average is somewhat skewed by some students who participated for very long periods before dropping out.

[13]It is important to realize that many of these one-month gaps may actually be the result of data problems (for example, a tutor who failed to report hours of participation for a particular month). It is not possible to distinguish such data problems from real interruptions in participation. For more discussion on how these data issues affect the analyses in this chapter, see Appendix C. However, to get an idea of the impact that one month of missing data may have, the analysis in Table 2.2 was repeated, defining "dropout" as a gap in program participation of *two months or more*. Under this definition, on average, most entering students (91 percent) still dropped out before the end of the 18-month follow-up period, but only 20 percent of these students later returned, compared with 36 percent under the one-month definition of dropout. If students did not participate for two months, the chances of their returning were thus substan-

(continued)

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Table 2.2**

**Participation Patterns in the First 18 Months for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample**

| Outcome | Average | Sample Size |
|---|---|---|
| Average length of first spell of participation (months) | 5.1 | 1,256 |
| Ever left program for 1 month or more (%) | 94.7 | 1,256 |
| Of those who left, ever returned: | | |
| After leaving for 1 month or more (%) | 35.6 | 1,189 |
| After leaving for 2 months or more (%) | 20.1 | 954 |
| After leaving for 6 months or more (%) | 6.2 | 791 |
| For those who left and ever returned, average length of first break in participation (months) | 2.5 | 423 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

These early quantitative findings are consistent with the qualitative research findings presented later in this chapter. That analysis notes how some adult learners (both the short-term and the intermittent learners) move in and out of programs as their personal circumstances, interests, and needs change. Together, these early findings suggest that programs should have a strategy for maintaining contact with students who drop out and for welcoming them back when they do return. Further, because most "returnees" become active again after a relatively short gap (three months or less), library programs might want to devote special outreach efforts to absent learners after this initial period, in hopes of stimulating more returns after the period dur-

tially lower. In addition, the average time that entering students remained active before dropping out for one month or more was 5.2 months; before dropping out for two months or more, entering students remained active for an average of 6.4 months.

ing which they typically occur. Making sure that learners know they are welcome to come back might be a way to raise the return rate.

### What Were the Initial Trends in Length of Participation?

As the LILAA programs began to implement changes intended to boost persistence, there was no clear trend in how long students participated, and much of the variation that did exist in the early months appears to have been a result of varying lengths of participation for students entering programs at different times of the year. Controlling for this seasonal variation, there are some hints of an encouraging trend in the percentage of students participating at least one month following program entry, but at this point there are not similar encouraging findings at three and six months of follow-up.

Figure 2.6 shows the rates of participation over time for six early cohorts of entrants. In this analysis, learners are grouped according to the calendar quarter when they entered. For example, these data show that 79 percent of the cohort of students who entered a LILAA program between January and March 2000 (the leftmost bar in each grouping of bars in the figure) were still active in the program in the month after entering; 56 percent were still active in the third month after entering; and 28 percent were active in the sixth month after entering.

The quarter in which a person enters a program appears to have an effect on participation. For example, those entering between April and June (the second bar in each grouping) were least likely to persist for one month or three months, while those entering between July and September (the third bar in each grouping) were most likely to persist. Some of these seasonal differences may be explained by students' schedules at different times of the year.[14] However, some of the variation across groups may be explained by other trends, such as changes in the economy, and by improvements in the completeness of the data over time as LILAA programs refined their operations. These findings on seasonal variation are just suggestive at this point, but if they hold up with longer follow-up, they could imply that programs might need to devote special efforts to making a connection with entrants who arrive at particular times of the year and might need to focus their outreach efforts to attract new participants at times of the year when people are most likely to maintain a connection with the program.[15]

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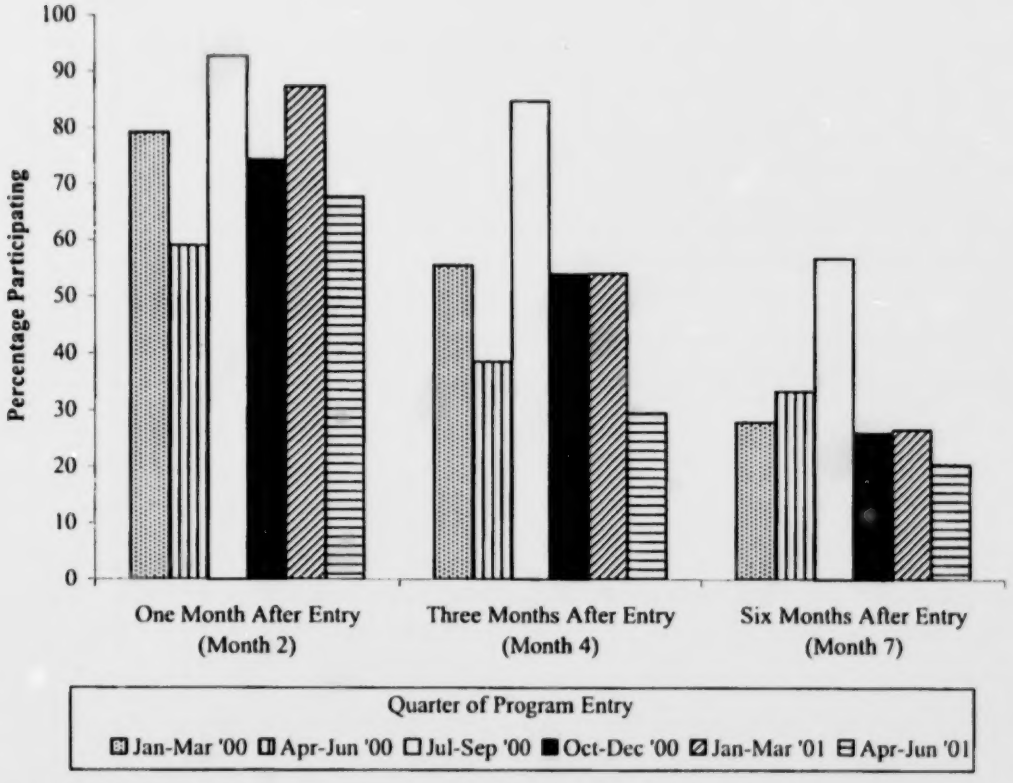
[14]Because of the location of the programs in places with relatively mild climates (California, North Carolina) or good public transportation systems (New York City), the seasonal variation is less likely to be explained by weather differences. These seasonal differences in participation may be related to differences in schedule demands in periods after participation starts. For example, parents who begin their literacy studies in the summer may find it easier to continue in the fall as school starts for their children, whereas those who begin in the spring soon face summer school vacation, when the demands of child care are likely to increase.

[15]Other groupings of months besides calendar quarters were examined — including a division that isolated the summer months — with similar results.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.6**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Short Follow-Up Sample, by Quarter of Program Entry**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Short Follow-Up Sample includes 2,110 new or returning participants entering the programs between January 2000 and June 2001. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

Some of the variation in length of participation across cohorts may also be the result of changes in the programs, including but not limited to the implementation of interventions aimed at increasing student persistence. Because many of these interventions are still in the beginning stages of implementation, it is too early to try to link changes in persistence over time to the effects of these interventions. However, the participation rates in the first month of follow-up do hint at an encouraging early trend: The first-month participation rates are higher for the January-March 2001 cohort and for the April-June 2001 cohort than for their counterparts who entered the programs a year earlier. At this point, this suggestive finding does not hold for the participation rates at three and six months after program entry — where a declining trend may be appearing. Analysis in the final report will include additional cohorts who entered at later points in time, when the interventions may have greater impact on program activities, and will assess whether stable trends emerged and seasonal effects persisted.

### How Much Time Did Literacy Students Spend in Literacy Activities?

Intensity of effort is also an important factor in determining literacy improvements, and this analysis focuses on two measures of intensity: (1) total hours of participation across the entire follow-up period and (2) average hours of participation during months when a student is active. The first measure is an indicator of the overall level of students' activity: How much time do they spend in program activities over an extended period? The second measure acknowledges that some students move in and out of active status and describes the intensity of their participation *when they are active.*

**Total Hours of Participation.** Students in the LILAA persistence study averaged 57 total hours of participation over 18 months, but influencing this average was a small number of students whose hours were quite high (the long-term participants), and a third of the sample who dropped out quickly (the short-term participants). Table 2.3 presents average total hours of participation and information about the distribution of total hours. Illustrating the substantial range of participation, 21 percent had over 80 hours of activity. At the other end of the distribution, 24 percent of the students had 10 hours or less of participation during this 18-month follow-up period. The median student had only 31 hours of participation (not shown in table).

Do library literacy students gradually participate less and less and then finally drop out, or do they abruptly leave a program? For these students in the LILAA programs, there was *not* a gradual tapering off of hours of participation prior to departure, and there is little evidence that the intensity of participation eroded before students left. Instead, students seem simply to have disappeared one day — a phenomenon that would severely limit the staff's ability to foresee and prevent such sudden departures.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Table 2.3**

**Total and Average Monthly Hours of Participation in the First 18 Months for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample**

| Outcome | |
|---|---|
| Average total hours of participation | 57.1 |
| 10 hours or less (%) | 24.3 |
| 11-30 hours (%) | 24.8 |
| 31-60 hours (%) | 21.3 |
| 61-80 hours (%) | 9.0 |
| 81 hours or more (%) | 20.6 |
| Average monthly hours of participation, when active | 7.1 |
| 3 hours or less (%) | 23.5 |
| 4-6 hours (%) | 35.0 |
| 7-9 hours (%) | 19.2 |
| 10-12 hours (%) | 10.0 |
| 13 hours or more (%) | 12.3 |
| Sample size | 1,256 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The average monthly hours of participation is calculated only for months in which the student was active.

At best, programs might seek to learn about aspects of students' lives that could pose a risk to continued participation (for example, fragile child care arrangements or potential health problems). However, these efforts might well be seen as inappropriately intrusive and might push learners away from the program, so there is no easy way to foresee departures. Regularly asking students in a general way about whether or not they are having trouble persisting might ensure that they at least have an opportunity to bring up any problems, if they choose to do so. Again, the best response may be to send a clear message that learners can and should remain in contact with the program even if they cannot participate actively.

**Hours of Participation While Active.** Shifting to measures of intensity of participation, Table 2.3 also shows average monthly hours of participation across months in which students were active. On average, students participated for approximately 7 hours in each month that they were active. This translates into less than 2 hours per week. In an average month, 24 percent of students participated for 3 hours or less, and 22 percent participated for 10 hours or more.[16]

Students who persisted longer also participated more intensely, right from the start. For example, students who participated continuously for at least three months averaged more than 9 hours of participation per month, and students who participated continuously for at least a year averaged about 12 hours per month (not shown in table). While students remained active, the intensity of participation did not consistently increase or decrease over time.[17]

Thus, there is a positive relationship between hours of participation (even in the early months) and persistence. Students who started out participating more were more likely to stick with the program. It is not yet possible to determine, however, whether intensive participation actually increases persistence or whether intensive participators are simply different from other learners at the outset.

### What Were the Initial Trends in Intensity of Participation?

Were there differences in participation intensity among entrants who joined the LILAA programs as the programs gradually began to implement strategies designed to improve persistence? As with the earlier look at length of participation, there is no clear trend over time, but once seasonal variation is controlled for, there are some hints of an encouraging initial trend as programs began to address problems of persistence.

Figure 2.7 shows the average monthly hours of participation one, three, and six months after program entry for groups of students entering LILAA programs at different times. As for other measures in this section, the focus is on hours of participation during months when a student was active in the program. This figure reinforces the finding that students who continued their participation over several months managed to maintain the intensity of their participation. For example, those students who entered a LILAA program between January and March 2000 and remained active in the subsequent month (represented by the leftmost bar in each grouping of bars in the figure) participated for an average of 8 hours during that month. Students in this

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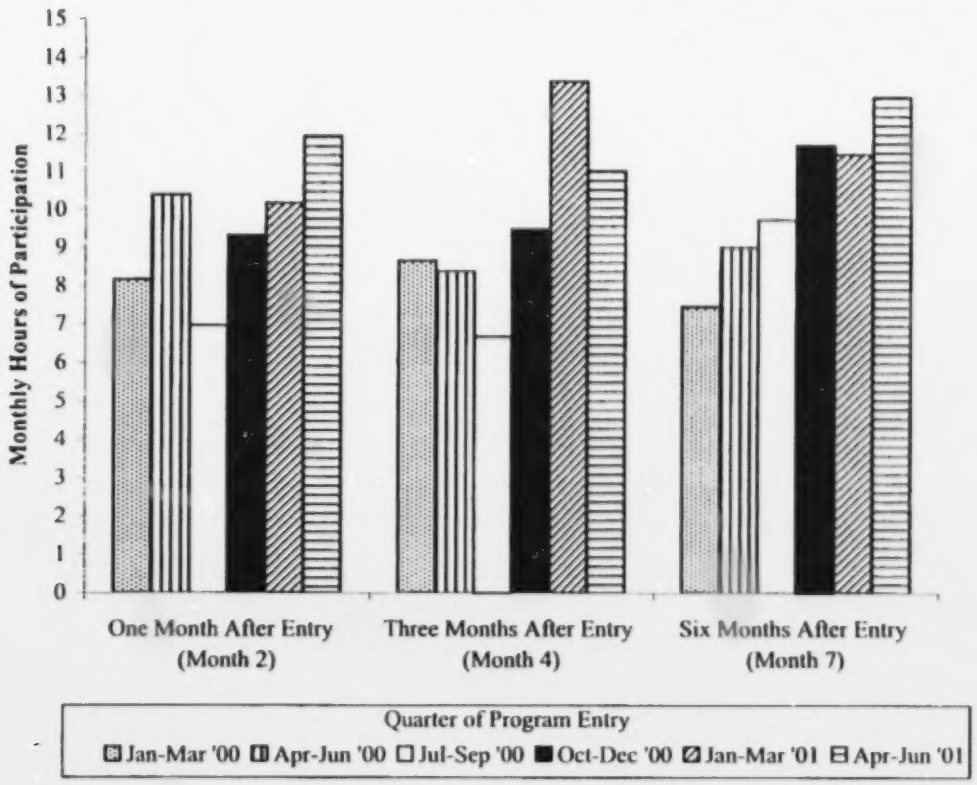
[16]These statistics, however, include some people who may have started midway through Month 1, and they also include people who attended only once and never came back.

[17]Analyzed a different way, students who averaged fewer than 6 hours of activity per month over the first three months stayed in the program for an average of 4.4 months before leaving for the first time, while those who participated more than 8 hours per month in the first three months stayed in the program for an average of 6.9 months before their first break (not shown in table).

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.7**

**Average Monthly Hours of Participation Over Time for Program Entrants in the Short Follow-Up Sample, by Quarter of Program Entry**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Short Follow-Up Sample includes 2,110 new or returning participants entering the programs between January 2000 and June 2001. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The average monthly hours of participation is calculated only for sample members who were active in that month.

cohort of entrants who were active in their third month after entry (the middle set of bars) participated for an average of 9 hours per month; those in this cohort who were active in their sixth month after entry (the rightmost grouping) participated for an average of 7 hours per month.

Figure 2.7 also illustrates that students who entered LILAA programs in the first and second quarters of 2001 were active for more hours than their counterparts who entered during the same quarters in 2000. (Because of the likelihood of seasonal variation, it is important to compare entrants from the same period in each year.) In all three snapshots in time — one, three, and six months after entry — those who entered in 2001 participated for more hours per month than those who entered in 2000. This observation suggests that the interventions undertaken in the LILAA initiative might have begun to have an effect on the intensity of participation among active students. Analysis of trends over time in terms of length and intensity of participation will be an important part of the final report.

This suggestion of an early trend toward increases in the intensity of participation while students were active contrasts with the lack of an encouraging early trend in the percentage of students who were active at three and six months of follow-up. The finding reported earlier in this section — that students seem to participate steadily and then abruptly disappear from the program — could be a partial explanation. If students leave a program because of difficult-to-anticipate changes in their lives (rather than because of a gradual decline in their ability to participate), then increasing the average length of participation could be much harder to do than raising the average intensity of participation while active in the program. When students are active, program features and support can help boost the amount of their participation. But if unexpected events outside the control of a program can end a student's participation, it will be harder to extend the length of participation.

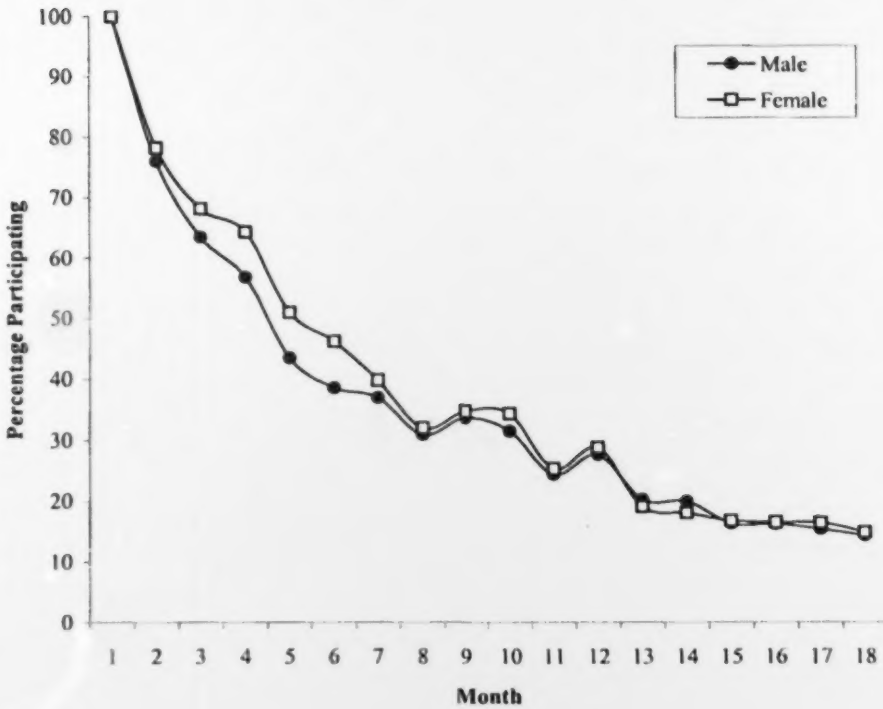
### Did Length of Participation Vary Across Subgroups of LILAA Students?

Did subgroups of LILAA students persist in their literacy activities at different rates? For example, did females tend to drop out earlier or to persist longer than males? For some subgroups (such as those defined by gender), the answer is relatively simple, because the sample is spread fairly uniformly across the sites. As Figure 2.8 shows, males and females in the five LILAA programs remained active at similar rates.[18] However, for other subgroups — such as those defined by ethnicity or primary mode of instruction — the local programs varied substantially; some served predominately one ethnic group or used one mode of instruction. Thus, in

[18]The differences between the two lines shown in Figure 2.8 are not statistically significant, with a few small exceptions during the earlier months.

**Figure 2.8**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Gender**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The month of follow-up is defined relative to the student's first month of participation; thus, Month 1 is the month that the student entered the program, Month 2 is the month following program entry, and so on. Month 1 could be a different calendar month for different students.

Seven students were missing gender data and are not included in these calculations.

these cases, it can be hard to disentangle subgroup differences from local program differences. Despite these complexities, however, some patterns emerge.

As shown in Figure 2.9, younger students tended to drop out at a faster rate than older students.[19] For example, after six months, 50 percent of students between ages 36 and 50 were still participating in literacy activities, compared with only 38 percent of students under age 21 and only 35 percent of students between ages 22 and 35. It is possible that younger students had alternative educational resources available to them, which could draw them away from these particular programs without really reflecting lower persistence in learning. This is illustrated by one of the case studies presented in the final section of this chapter, in which a younger student shifted to another program in the community in order to be with more students his own age.

Employment status at program entry also seems to have created slightly different patterns of persistence, although perhaps not as one would expect. Figure 2.10 shows that students who reported that they were employed full time when they enrolled in library literacy programs dropped out at a slightly slower rate than those who reported part time or no employment.[20] For example, six months after starting a program, 61 percent of students who were employed full time were still participating, compared with 57 percent of students who were not employed at the time of their enrollment and 55 percent of those who were employed part time at entry. Nine months after starting a program, 51 percent of students who were employed full time at entry were still participating, compared with 42 percent of students who were not employed and 44 percent of those who had been employed part time at entry.[21]

One might expect that individuals who have jobs would find it more difficult to devote hours to a program because of the time conflicts they face. However, in other ways, students who are working when they enroll may be better equipped to persist in a literacy program. For example, they may be more accustomed to a routine schedule. Furthermore, their ability to hold a job may indicate that they do not face child care responsibilities or health problems or that they have support services or assistance from friends and family that help them take on demanding activities like work and program participation.

For ethnic subgroups, local program differences in the ethnic composition of learners come into play in the analysis. As Figure 2.11 shows, there are differences in participation rates across the ethnic subgroups. These are statistically significant, even when controlling for differences in the distribution of ethnic groups across the library programs (not shown in figure).

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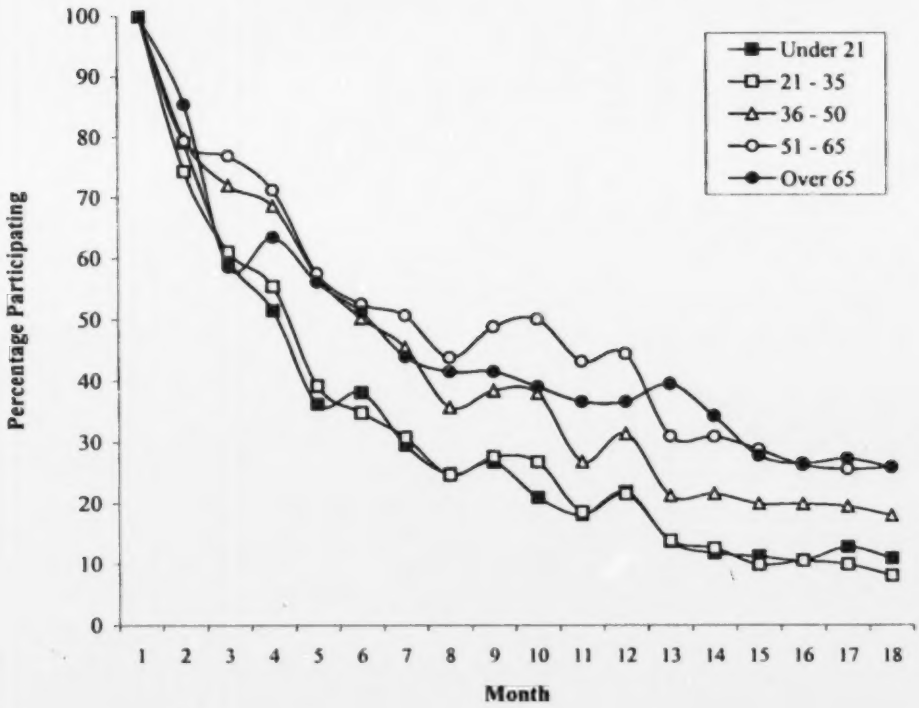
[19]After Month 2 of follow-up, the differences in participation rates across the age categories are statistically significant at the 1 percent level.

[20]Note that Figure 2.10 shows participation only for those students for whom information on employment was available at the time of program entry. This excludes 433 students across the nine programs.

[21]This pattern continues through Month 14 and is statistically significant in Months 8, 9, and 12.

**Figure 2.9**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Age Group**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

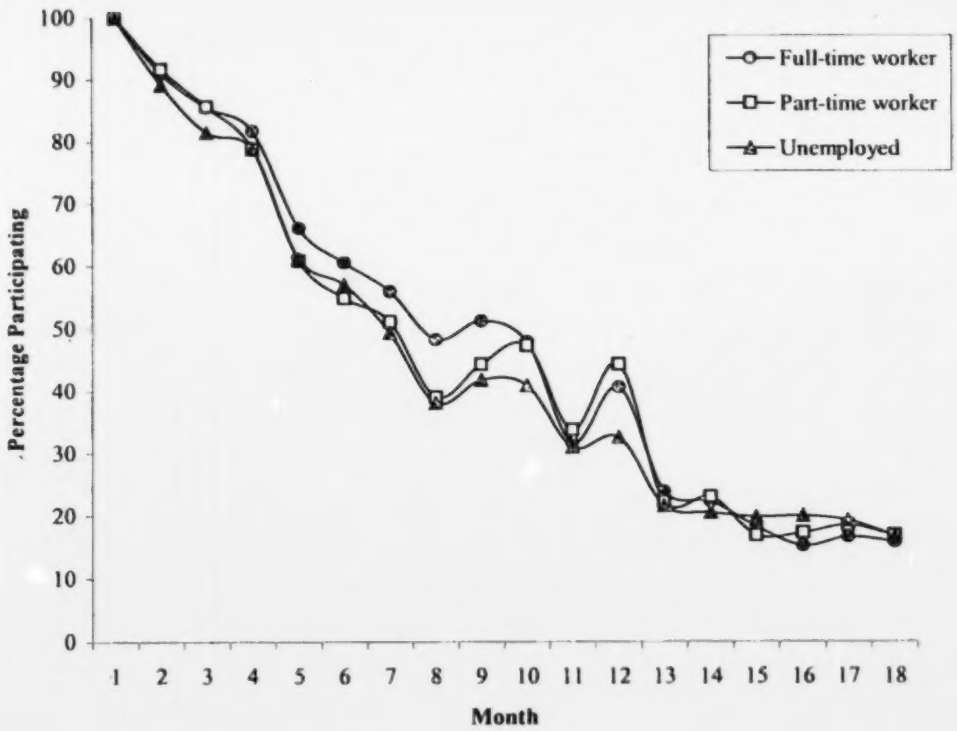
NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The month of follow-up is defined relative to the student's first month of participation; thus, Month 1 is the month that the student entered the program, Month 2 is the month following program entry, and so on. Month 1 could be a different calendar month for different students.

Thirty-five students were missing age data and are not included in these calculations.

**Figure 2.10**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Employment Status**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

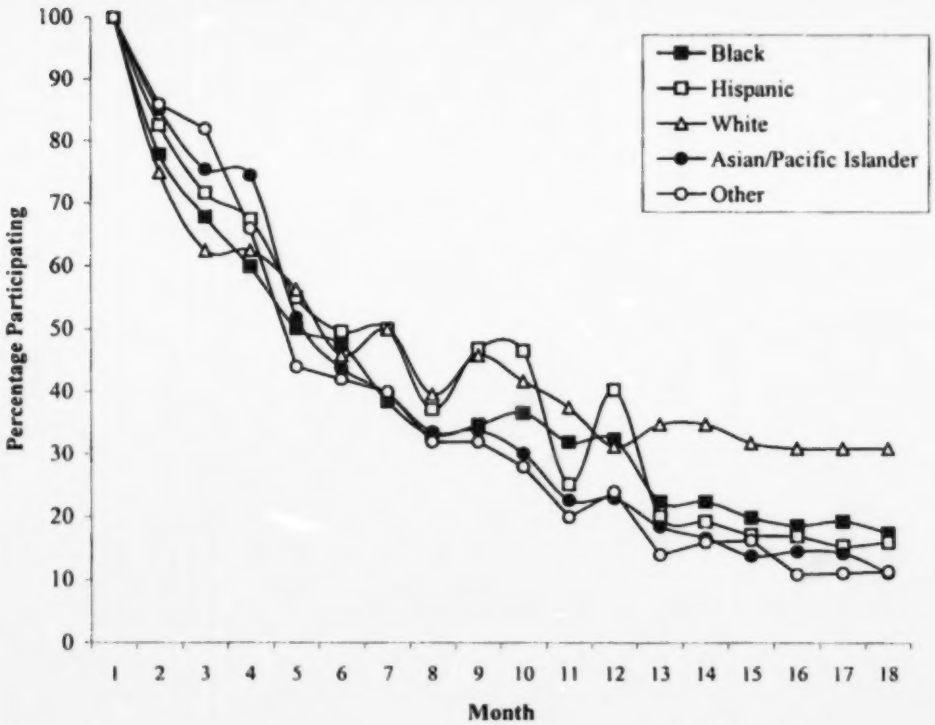
NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The month of follow-up is defined relative to the student's first month of participation; thus, Month 1 is the month that the student entered the program, Month 2 is the month following program entry, and so on. Month 1 could be a different calendar month for different students.

A total of 433 students were missing employment data and are not included in these calculations.

**Figure 2.11**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Ethnicity**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The month of follow-up is defined relative to the student's first month of participation; thus, Month 1 is the month that the student entered the program, Month 2 is the month following program entry, and so on. Month 1 could be a different calendar month for different students.

A total of 149 students were missing ethnicity data and are not included in these calculations.

However, the differences are generally small and are not consistent.[22] At this stage, these findings do not suggest any particular programmatic response.

Finally, there are clear differences in participation when entrants are disaggregated by their program's primary mode of instruction: classes taught by professional instructors, tutoring done by volunteers (either paired tutoring or in small groups), or computer lab (used independently or in small groups).[23] Figure 2.12 shows that entrants whose primary mode of instruction was tutoring by volunteers were much more likely to participate over time than students whose primary mode of instruction was the computer lab. It also shows that those primarily working in computer labs were more likely to participate than entrants primarily participating in classes taught by professional instructors.[24] For example, by Month 2, only 52 percent of students participating primarily in classes were still active in the program, whereas 85 percent of students participating primarily in tutoring stayed active. These large differences remained over time: 20 percent in classes versus 57 percent in tutoring were active in Month 6, and 11 percent versus 43 percent, respectively, were active in Month 12.[25] Throughout the 18-month follow-up period, the participation rate of students who were primarily in computer labs fell between these two extremes.

These findings should be seen as preliminary for several reasons. It is hard to separate the effects of the primary mode of instruction from differences across local programs; though tutoring is the central element of most programs, the sites vary in their use of supplemental methods such as classes and computer labs. Further, students can participate in different ways in these modes of instruction; computers may be used by students awaiting a tutor or by more advanced students, for writing and preparing for the GED or other tests. Likewise, classes taught by instructors can be supplementary, focusing on specific skills such as spelling or on specific content areas, or students may attend classes as they await the assignment of a tutor. The final report will present further analysis of the participation data, by predominate mode of instruction, as well as field research on the ways in which different programs used the various instructional modes.

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[22]The one exception is for white students, who make up such a small percentage of all entering students (approximately 5 percent) that it is difficult to interpret these differences.

[23]The primary mode of instruction is defined as the one in which students spent the most hours during the 18-month follow-up period. Computer lab usually entails computer-assisted instruction, though staff in one site guide the students' use of the computer, and hours spent writing on the computer are included in this category.

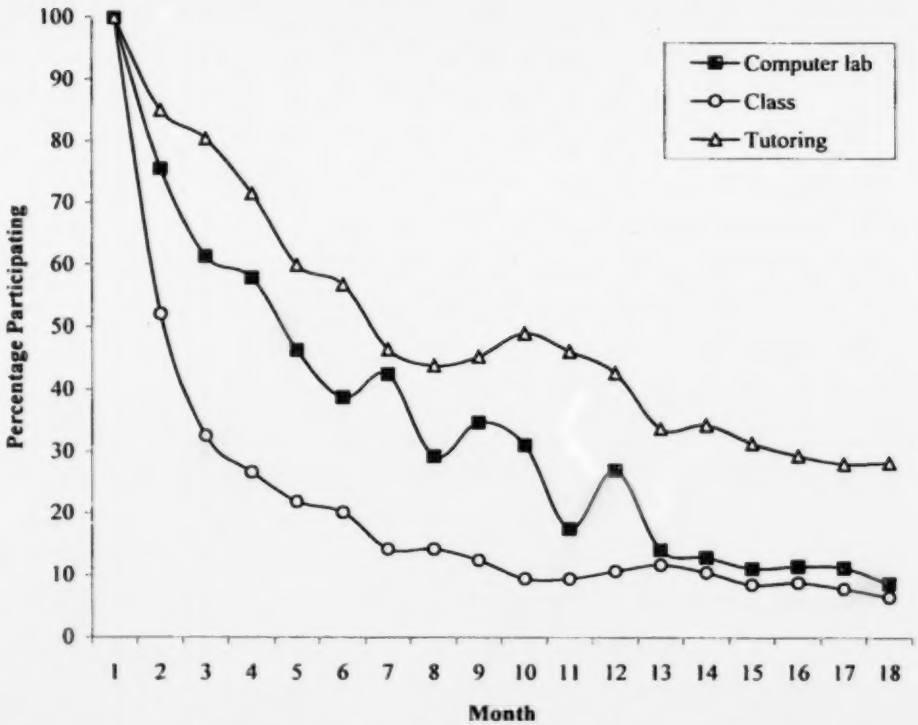
[24]These differences are statistically significant.

[25]Note that it was more difficult for programs to capture time spent in tutoring and computer lab, but despite any underreporting relative to classes, these modes of instruction still led to greater persistence. For discussion of issues related to data limitations, see Appendix C.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Figure 2.12**

**Percentage Participating in Any Activity Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Primary Activity**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The month of follow-up is defined relative to the student's first month of participation; thus, Month 1 is the month that the student entered the program, Month 2 is the month following program entry, and so on. Month 1 could be a different calendar month for different students.

"Primary activity" is defined as the activity in which the student spent the most hours during the 18 months of follow-up.

A total of 135 students were missing primary activity data and are not included in these calculations.

### Did Intensity of Participation Vary by Subgroup?

Table 2.4 presents measures of total hours and average monthly hours of participation in active months for various subgroups of students; statistically significant differences across subgroups are indicated by stars. Key findings are the following:

- **Gender.** Participation intensity for males and females was similar, both for total hours and average monthly hours while active.
- **Age.** Older students participated for more total hours than younger students because, as discussed earlier, their participation was sustained over a longer time. However, average hours during active months did not vary in a statistically significant way.
- **Ethnicity.** There were statistically significant differences between ethnic subgroups in terms of both total hours and average monthly hours of participation while active, even when controlling for the local program. Black students participated for the most total hours and had the highest average monthly hours, and Asian and Pacific Islander and white students had the lowest monthly hours of participation. As noted earlier, these differences could, in part, result from program-specific characteristics, because the ethnic groups tend to be clustered by program and because the statistical controls for local programs do not completely isolate the effects of ethnic differences.
- **Employment Status at Program Entry.** Total hours of participation did not vary significantly by initial employment status. Although employed students were shown to remain active longer, this did not translate into higher hours of participation overall, because nonemployed students had higher average hours during active months.

It is interesting to note that few students who were not employed at the time of enrollment even approached "half-time" participation in these programs. Only about 9 percent of all participants who were not employed when they enrolled participated for more than 15 hours a month on average (not shown in table). This may partly reflect limitations of the databases underlying these figures, but it also reflects the operations of the library literacy programs in this study, which tend to rely on volunteer tutors who have limited hours to spend with students. As a result, even students who had relatively few other demands on their available time may not have participated in activities for many hours a month.

Table 2.4 also shows measures of average total monthly hours for students according to primary mode of instruction. The table includes hours for all student activities, not just hours in

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Table 2.4**

**Total and Average Monthly Hours of Participation in the First 18 Months for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Subgroup**

| Subgroup | Total Hours | | Average Monthly Hours, When Active | | Sample Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Median | Mean | Median | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Male | 57.0 | 28.6 | 7.3 | 5.9 | 495 |
| Female | 57.3 | 33.4 | 6.9 | 5.7 | 754 |
| Age group | | | | | |
| Under 21 | 49.2 | 31.6 | 7.2 | 6.0 | 105 |
| 21 - 35 | 44.8 | 23.0 | 6.6 | 5.5 | 475 |
| 36 - 50 | 63.5 *** | 40.8 | 7.2 | 5.8 | 440 |
| 51 - 65 | 76.8 | 53.2 | 7.5 | 6.1 | 160 |
| Over 65 | 82.8 | 45.8 | 8.2 | 6.9 | 41 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Black | 74.5 | 42.7 | 8.4 | 7.0 | 429 |
| Hispanic | 62.8 | 42.9 | 7.0 | 5.8 | 258 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 45.2 *** | 26.5 | 5.8 *** | 4.6 | 322 |
| White | 49.0 | 39.1 | 5.6 | 5.2 | 48 |
| Other | 53.1 | 36.0 | 7.1 | 5.9 | 50 |
| Employment status | | | | | |
| Employed | 68.2 | 47.7 | 7.0 | 5.9 | 369 |
| Full time | 70.4 | 47.5 | 7.2 | 5.9 | 236 |
| Part time | 64.4 | 51.1 | 6.8 ** | 6.1 | 133 |
| Not employed | 73.4 | 50.3 | 8.1 | 6.2 | 454 |
| Primary activity | | | | | |
| Tutoring | 88.6 | 55.5 | 8.6 | 7.3 | 347 |
| Classes | 29.3 *** | 12.5 | 6.3 *** | 5.5 | 169 |
| Computer lab | 49.3 | 27.9 | 6.7 | 5.5 | 605 |
| Full sample | 57.1 | 31.3 | 7.1 | 5.8 | 1,256 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The average monthly hours of participation is calculated only for months in which the student was active.

Subgroup differences were evaluated using an analysis of variance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

the primary mode of instruction. It shows that students whose primary mode of instruction was tutoring participated for 8.6 hours per month, on average — 37 percent more time than students whose primary mode of instruction was classes and 28 percent more time than students whose primary mode of instruction was computer lab. These findings are statistically significant when controlling for program, and they further demonstrate that students' primary mode of instruction may affect their persistence, not just in continuing to participate from one month to the next but also for participating more hours each month. Paired and small-group tutoring are associated with the highest monthly hours of participation. As noted earlier, differences in participation that are associated with modes of instruction will be explored further in the final report.

### Were There Initial Differences in Participation Across the LILAA Programs?

So far, this chapter has presented findings on the retention of students and the intensity of participation for the sample of entering students who were active in any of the nine LILAA programs. The following sections look at some of the variation in these measures across the programs. In the final report, it may be possible to link trends in participation at the program level to the interventions that the programs are implementing to increase student persistence.

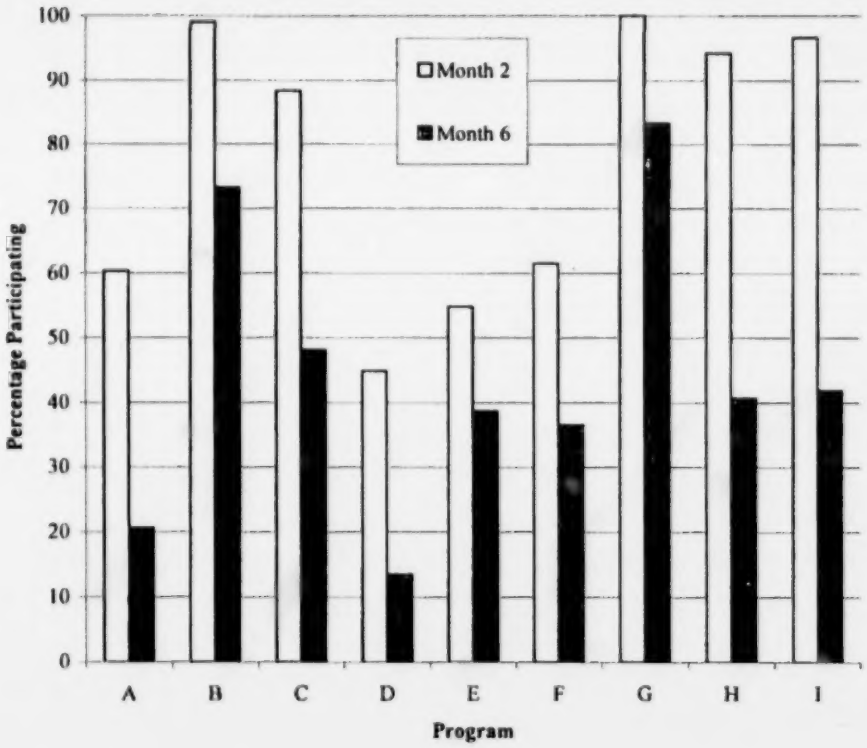
**Length of Participation.** As presented above, across all libraries, 77.2 percent of entering students continued to participate in literacy activities past their initial month of activity. As shown in Figure 2.13, across the LILAA programs, 45 percent to 100 percent of students remained active in the second month.[26] This variation may reflect the different subgroups served, but it may also reflect some variation in the effects that the programs had on students' ability or desire to persist, at least at the start of their involvement. For example, programs that actively enhanced their orientation for entering students may have had more success in retaining students in the first months after enrollment.

Figure 2.13 also shows the percentage of students who were active in Month 6, when participation ranged from 14 percent to 83 percent. In most cases, those programs with high rates for one-month retention also had relatively high rates for six-month retention and vice versa. But there are a couple of exceptions. For example, one program retained only 55 percent of entering students through Month 2, but it still retained 39 percent through Month 6. Again, this may reflect data issues and underlying differences in the characteristics of the students served, but it also may show that some programs may excel in getting students to stay active

[26]However, because two of the programs initially reported data for periods longer than one month, reported participation hours were spread evenly across the early months in the reporting period. Therefore, some of these very high retention rates are inflated. This occurred for new students at one library in 2000 and at another library until May 2001.

**Figure 2.13**

**Percentage Participating Over Time for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Program**




SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

Sites sometimes reported participation data for a period longer than a single month. In these cases, hours were divided among the months. Thus, if a site reported in three-month increments, a student who was active at any point during that period would be considered active for all months in the period. This leads to some inflation of the percentage participating in the short term and helps explain why some sites appear to retain 100 percent of their students into the second month of participation.

when they are new to literacy activities, while other programs may be more successful at keeping students over a longer period of time. This may be due to the types of activities that the programs offer or to the other types of services in place, perhaps aimed at helping students to overcome short- or long-term obstacles to persistence. These possibilities will be explored in the final report.

**Interruptions and Returns.** As previously discussed, 35.5 percent of entering students who dropped out of a literacy program for at least one month during the follow-up period also returned during the follow-up period. As shown in Table 2.5, however, behind these averages, there was substantial variation across the programs. For example, in Programs B and G (Figure 2.13), most of the students continued to participate after one month, and a relatively large proportion of them (41 percent in both cases) returned to the program after an eventual interruption in activity. In Programs H and I, by contrast, although most of the students also continued to participate after their first month, substantially smaller proportions (22 percent and 8 percent, respectively) returned after stopping participation. Program E lost a larger percentage of students after one month, but half the students who stopped participating at some point returned to the program.

These different patterns suggest that student persistence can mean different things for different programs and, therefore, that programs might pursue different strategies to increase persistence. In Programs H and I, students who persisted tended to participate month after month, maintaining frequent activity with the literacy programs; but once students left, they were unlikely to return. At other programs, like Program E, students who persisted may have stopped and started their participation, but they maintained it over a longer period, despite those interruptions. These observations suggest that some programs might increase persistence by focusing on helping students to remain engaged, even if their circumstances make them miss a month, whereas other programs might focus on preventing frequent interruptions in students' participation.

**Intensity of Participation.** As shown in Table 2.6, the total hours that students spent in literacy activities during the 18-month follow-up period also varied across the programs. Average total hours ranged from 22 to 98, but some programs had a substantial number of students participating for many more hours. For example, 25 percent of entering students in Program B participated for more than a total of 127 hours (not shown in table), which represents this program's high retention rate and relatively high program intensity. Those programs that started with a relatively high intensity of participation, as reflected in average hours in the second month, were not all able to sustain this intensity over time, suggesting that efforts to support high intensity may need to take different forms as participation continues. These observed differences in intensity could indicate different program capacities to help students persist, in terms of dedicating substantial amounts of time to literacy activities, but they could also indicate different foci of the programs, in terms of the types of students served and the types and frequency of instruction offered.

**The LILAA Persistence Study**

**Table 2.5**

**Participation Patterns in the First 18 Months for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Program**

| Outcome | Program | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I |
| Average length of first spell of participation (months) | 2.9 | 8.5 | 5.6 | 2.0 | 3.2 | 4.9 | 7.5 | 6.1 | 6.7 |
| Ever left program for 1 month or more (%) | 98 | 90 | 95 | 99 | 96 | 87 | 97 | 94 | 84 |
| Of those who left, ever returned: | | | | | | | | | |
| After leaving for 1 month or more (%) | 34 | 41 | 35 | 27 | 53 | 62 | 41 | 22 | 8 |
| After leaving for 2 months or more (%) | 22 | 7 | 10 | 19 | 39 | 48 | 39 | 19 | 4 |
| After leaving for 6 months or more (%) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 25 | 20 | 3 | 4 |
| For those who left and ever returned, average length of first break in participation (months) | 2.4 | 1.4 | 1.7 | 3.6 | 2.6 | 3.3 | 4.0 | 2.8 | 4.5 |
| Sample size | 184 | 217 | 241 | 178 | 124 | 52 | 72 | 157 | 31 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students from programs D, E, and I may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

## Table 2.6

### Total and Average Monthly Hours of Participation in the First 18 Months for Program Entrants in the Extended Follow-Up Sample, by Program

| Subgroup | Total Hours | | Average Monthly Hours, When Active | | Hours in First Full Month | | Sample Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Median | Mean | Median | Mean | | |
| Program | | | | | | | |
| A | 35.3 | 14.8 | 6.6 | 5.5 | 9.1 | | 184 |
| B | 98.3 | 59.3 | 9.1 | 6.9 | 9.0 | | 217 |
| C | 45.4 | 26.6 | 4.8 | 4.1 | 4.5 | | 241 |
| D | 21.5 | 10.0 | 6.2 | 4.9 | 8.7 | | 178 |
| E | 64.0 | *** 26.9 | 7.4 | *** 5.5 | 12.4 | *** | 124 |
| F | 71.7 | 41.5 | 7.2 | 6.0 | 9.6 | | 52 |
| G | 74.0 | 55.3 | 8.0 | 7.2 | 7.4 | | 72 |
| H | 61.8 | 28.5 | 7.6 | 6.6 | 8.0 | | 157 |
| I | 76.5 | 42.7 | 10.4 | 10.1 | 10.4 | | 31 |
| Full sample | 57.1 | 31.3 | 7.1 | 5.8 | 8.1 | | 1,256 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from site-reported participation data collected between January 2000 and December 2001.

NOTES: The Extended Follow-Up Sample includes 1,256 new or returning students who had at least 18 months of data available. Some students from programs D, E, and I may have had only 12-17 months of data available. (See Appendix B for a full description of the sample.)

The average monthly hours of participation is calculated only for months in which the student was active.

Subgroup differences were evaluated using an analysis of variance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

## How Did the Broader Context of Participants' Lives Affect Their Persistence?

The analyses presented above show that persistence in the LILAA programs is limited but that there is considerable diversity among students. Within this diversity, types of students emerge, and examples of key barriers to participation and supports appear.[27] These findings can help program staff, policymakers, and researchers develop more realistic strategies for supporting students' persistence and goals.

From the perspective of program staff, students appear, disappear, and suddenly reappear many times, and staff may feel that they struggle to help students achieve higher literacy skills even though students show little consistency in attendance. Staff may not notice different participation patterns among students, and they may have to fight the tendency to label students who do not meet participation expectations as being somehow deficient. Little is known about students outside the context of the individual program — unless programs conduct brief inventories of goals, or if students are mandated to attend (and thus more is known about them through their social service link).

Linking student persistence and participation to students' lives outside the program allows for a multifaceted view of persistence that acknowledges differences among students. The brief case studies of students presented in this section reveal the ties between persistence in a program and the complexity of students' outside lives, why and how students use literacy services to reach their goals, the barriers they face, and the resources they draw on as they seek to improve literacy skills. More important, the case studies help develop and illustrate categories of students who have similar needs and, therefore, can be served with common interventions.

### Patterns of Persistence: Case Studies

At this stage in the project, the research team has identified four patterns of student persistence: intermittent, short term, long term, and mandatory.

**Intermittent Persistence.** Intermittent persistence is illustrated by students who have joined a library literacy program, left it, and returned at a later time or several times. Intermittent students may maintain some form of connection to the program while they are not participating. They often leave because of a crisis or difficulty in their lives and then return when the problem

[27]The research team developed case studies of 30 students during the first year of the project (spring 2000 to spring 2001), but this chapter focuses on only four of them. Additional findings will be presented in the final report for this project, to be completed in 2003. Of the participants in the 30 case studies, 11 are African-Americans, 17 are immigrants (Asian, Afro-Caribbean, African, and Hispanic), and 2 are native-born Caucasians.

has passed, or they may leave temporarily or stay partly connected to the program if their tutor leaves and they are awaiting a new one. Intermittent students may be focused on either broad goals (such as improving their language and basic skills) or specific goals (passing a citizenship test). This group might persist longer if the program could maintain some form of contact with them, find out why they stopped, provide them with a way to continue learning during their time of nonparticipation, and welcome them back as soon as they are ready to return. If a student has left the program because his or her tutor departed, a quick rematch would be important. Support strategies might also be critical for intermittent students.

**Elena: Following an Immigrant's Dreams.** Elena has been an intermittent participant at Project READ for two years. She moved to California from El Salvador when she was 17 years old. At the time, she did not speak English and did not have a high school diploma. Now 26, Elena is working toward a number of specific literacy goals that will enable her to improve her career prospects, raise her income, and better support her children. Already she has passed the GED exam in Spanish, improved her English, and learned to read stories to her sons; currently, she is preparing for a pharmacy technician exam.

Elena's accomplishments have not come easily, and she works very hard. Balancing work with child care and her studies has been an enormous burden. Transportation has also been problematic. She has often had to miss tutoring sessions, and sometimes she has just been too tired. Moreover, Elena has at times had to flee an abusive husband, who often prevented her from leaving the house and attending adult schools in the community. She has been in and out of shelters and has struggled to support her children.

Yet Elena's determination has led her to stick to her goals and continue her learning when she can. Even being put on the long waiting list for tutors at Project READ did not dissuade her. She was on the waiting list for two years before being assigned her first tutor, and when that tutor left the program, she was put back on the waiting list for another six months. During these periods, she found classes at other programs or participated in the library's Story Hour program with her children.

Despite a number of setbacks, Elena has been able to piece together a pattern of intermittent participation in literacy activities that has led to success. Along the way, she has had a lot of support from her friends and her tutor. Three times a week, she visits her tutor's home, where her youngest son watches TV while she studies. Her social workers and friends helped her leave her abusive husband and encourage her in her literacy activities. Some-

day, Elena hopes to help other women like herself by becoming a lawyer and defending victims of domestic abuse.

**Short-Term Persistence.** Short-term persistence is demonstrated by students who enroll in a library literacy program and participate intensively for a short period of time in order to accomplish a specific goal or to start a transition in their lives. That goal may be enrollment in another program, such as a GED preparation class, or the attainment of adequate skills for a job. Short-term students sometimes also engage in self-study. This group should be helped to move on if a different program is more appropriate for their needs. If these students attain their short-term goals or make a connection to a more appropriate program, their short period of participation should be viewed as a success. For this group, educational and vocational counseling as well as exit interviews would be important in learning about and documenting their program transitions.

**Larry: Finding a Stepping-Stone Toward Graduation.** Larry, a 19-year-old recent immigrant from Jamaica, attended literacy activities at the Adult Learning Center (ALC) of the Central branch of Queens Borough Public Library. The ALC was just a 10-minute cab ride from his home in Jamaica, Queens, and his mother funded the trips. Larry felt comfortable with his assigned small tutoring group, and he enjoyed the Books-on-Tape and reading materials on Michael Jordan and Pele. However, because Larry had not finished high school, he wanted a setting that was more like a school — someplace that he could "graduate" from and meet others like himself. There were few people his age at the ALC.

Larry's main goal has been to earn a GED. He considers himself, in his words, a "slow learner," as he has always struggled in school and with reading. But support from family and friends instilled a strong determination to persist in his education. Although he did not remain in the literacy program offered by the Central branch of Queens Borough Public Library, the program served as a stepping-stone toward his goals and motivated him to find a program that better fits his needs.

**Long-Term Persistence.** Long-term persistence is seen in students who are active in a library literacy program over a long period of time and who participate regularly in classes, tutoring, or computer-assisted instruction or other self-study activities. Long-term students may simultaneously use another program in the community as well. They usually do not have specific goals but, rather, are seeking a schooling experience or are pursuing larger life goals. In addition, some of these students may be using the program — and attending consistently — as a way to engage in human interaction, and programs should acknowledge that these students are receiving a valuable service that may not produce learning gains. Programs should

help long-term students to develop realistic, specific goals and to monitor their progress as well as offer them diverse learning opportunities.

**Opal: Finding a Community for Learning.** Opal, an African-American woman originally from rural North Carolina, has lived most of her 80 years in the Bronx. After retiring in her early seventies from work as a housecleaner and cook, Opal decided to go back to school. She spent one year attending Bronx Community College, but when the program closed, she started classes and tutoring sessions at New York Public Library's Center for Reading and Writing (CRW) at the Francis Martin branch (not part of the LILAA study) and immediately loved the staff and tutors. After a few years — despite a devastating setback when her literacy tutor was killed in a car accident — and the temporary closure of the Francis Martin branch's center, Opal continued her literacy studies by transferring to the CRW at the library's Fordham branch.

In the three years that Opal has been at the Fordham CRW, she has become very close with her new tutor. She says that they share an interest in religion, a very important part of Opal's life. Opal is also learning to read a variety of materials; she reads the Bible at home in the morning, because "the minute you drink that water, you OK — right the minute I read this, I'm OK." She reads *Time* magazine too, because a family member works for the company. At the CRW, she reads books about the lives of African-Americans who, like her, migrated from the South and struggled to be successful — including an adult literacy version of a biography of Oprah Winfrey. Opal finds these texts challenging, and although she feels "slow," she commented, "If I sit down and take my time, I can read it."

Opal would also like to learn more about computers but wishes that she had more individualized assistance because she doesn't know how to operate them. She also feels frustrated with her math group and stopped attending it because it was back-to-back with another one and was overwhelming. Her lack of confidence in these two areas is her main barrier to learning, and she feels as though she needs more help. However, she continues to attend activities at the Fordham CRW because she feels that it lets her experience the education she was denied as a child. Although she often becomes tired or gets headaches and doesn't stay long, she doesn't have many responsibilities that interfere with her being able to attend often. Although Opal says that she doesn't have a specific goal, she is motivated to continue her studies by her

desire to read the Bible, by her role models, and by the staff. She plans to attend for as long as she can.

**Mandatory Persistence.** Mandatory persistence is exemplified by students who must attend a literacy program because they are required to do so by a public assistance program. Their attendance is usually steady and long term, and their stated goals are often related to those of the assistance program. Library literacy programs should help these students form their own goals for participation, if they have not already established them, so that they can come to see mandatory participation as an opportunity rather than a punishment. Some of these students who would not normally enter a literacy program may get "hooked" and may start participating regularly, increasing their motivation to learn. In addition, once their public assistance ends and they become more independent, they may need additional assistance to persist in literacy studies.

**Mel: Moving from Mandatory to Motivated Learning.** When Mel told his CalWORKs counselor that he could not read or write well enough to take the food service job that was recommended for him, the counselor told him to call Second Start. Hesitant, but without a choice, Mel sought help from the literacy program. At 52, it was the first time that he had told anyone about his literacy problems. Not even his girlfriend of four years knew about his reading difficulties. Until he found Second Start, Mel felt that he had been able to compensate for his lack of literacy skills with "street knowledge." But now he appreciates a point that his counselor made, and he says: "It takes a man to realize that he needs help and to ask somebody for help."

Mel worked on the computers and was assigned a tutor three weeks after he started. He set a goal to attend every day that he could, four days a week. When his tutoring began, he was concerned about other people's seeing him at a literacy program, preferring to keep to himself and to meet with his tutor in a private room. However, as he came to realize that the other students at Second Start were in the same situation — improving their literacy and working on their own problems — Mel soon came to feel comfortable. In addition to working with his tutor, Mel spends a lot of time in the computer lab, and he reads at home every morning. His goal is to be able to read the Bible.

Mel feels that he has a number of "brothers," or positive role models supporting his efforts to learn to read, including his tutor and caseworker. They are meaningful to his persistence. He says that someday he would like to give back, as a counselor helping other students with whom he can identify. Although he attends Second Start because he is required to do so, he has come to terms with his learning needs and has found the personal motivation to persist.

### Different Patterns, Different Approaches

The foregoing case studies demonstrate that students arrive at a library literacy program with different histories, goals, levels of determination, and life responsibilities — all of which are important factors in persistence and may result in different patterns of persistence. From a programmatic point of view, a student with a short-term or an intermittent pattern of participation may look like a failure, compared with a long-term participant who consistently attends one program. However, the short-term student may move on to another educational program, and the intermittent student may be making steady progress toward specific goals over a longer period of time. Conversely, some long-term students are seeking human interaction and personal growth — goals that are harder to measure. These case studies demonstrate that programmers may need to take different approaches to improve the persistence of students who show different patterns of participation. The case studies point out that success in improving persistence may take various forms. Despite the complexity of adult learners' lives, the goal of this research is to establish a small number of patterns — though probably more than the four identified in the initial implementation phase of this study — that library literacy programs can use to match their services to the needs of a variety of students.

## Conclusion

The picture presented in this chapter underscores the importance of both the LILAA persistence study and the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds initiative that underlies it. The data show considerable diversity — in the types of students who enroll in library literacy programs, in the degrees of their persistence, and in the patterns of their persistence. The data also show that, overall, persistence is low, for numerous and complex reasons. During the first 18 months of follow-up, an average student participated for about 5 months before leaving for the first time, and over one-third of those who left returned to participate in later months. In the months that they attended, students averaged approximately 7 hours of participation per month. These averages are skewed, so a typical (median) student would have somewhat shorter participation spells and fewer hours. Despite the diversity of participation, the overall levels of participation at the start of the LILAA project highlight the need to increase student persistence. Also, the various patterns of persistence found among the case studies highlight the need to differentiate approaches in increasing persistence. Given that most students start out reading at the third- or fourth-grade level, they most likely need substantially more hours of literacy instruction than they currently receive in order to make significant progress in their literacy skills.

Chapter 3

# What Are the LILAA Programs Doing to Improve Student Persistence?

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the adult students in the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) programs have very low literacy levels. Typically, they score at level 1 or level 2 of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).[1] Generally, it would be very difficult for students who read at these levels to improve their literacy and achieve their goals if they participate in a literacy program only sporadically or for short periods. The findings in Chapter 2 about the diversity of the students' backgrounds, the types of barriers they face, and their patterns of persistence demonstrate the importance of addressing persistence in library literacy programs and of finding approaches that fit a variety of needs. Through the LILAA initiative, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds is helping the library literacy programs in this study address the pressing issue of persistence among adult students.

At the center of the initiative are the tasks of designing and implementing specific strategies for improving student persistence. These strategies are aimed either at addressing a range of barriers that impede students' participation in a library literacy program or at enhancing supports that bolster participation. After just 18 months of planning and implementation, it is too early to assess the effects that any of these strategies have had on students; however, it is already evident that participation in this study, with its focus on persistence, has strengthened these nine well-established library literacy programs. In devising strategies, the programs in this study have gained a deeper understanding of the barriers and supports to continued participation and have sharpened their focus on the importance of persistence. At the same time, the libraries have also discovered the complex challenges in implementing new approaches and finding what best fits the needs of their students and program. This chapter analyzes the LILAA programs' experiences and challenges in the initial implementation phase of the persistence study, from January 2000 through June 2001.

## What Kinds of Strategies Do the LILAA Programs Use?

During the design phase of the project, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and the LILAA program directors agreed on a set of four categories to guide them in selecting and

[1] In 1992, the U.S. Department of Education undertook the National Adult Literacy Survey, which measured literacy and math skills using a five-level scale. Each NALS level represents a range of skills. According to the survey, 21 percent to 23 percent of the U.S. adult population would score in level 1, and another 25 percent to 28 percent would score in level 2. See Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993.

planning strategies for the initiative. Each program was expected to tailor strategies to address the unique needs of its learners, community, and institutional context; however, defining common categories encouraged the programs to focus on specific issues associated with the persistence of adult students and created learning opportunities for the field by establishing comparable strategies across the sites. The four categories of strategies used by literacy programs in the LILAA persistence study are defined below.

- **Information-Gathering Strategies.**[2] These refer to efforts to gain more knowledge about student persistence. Included are strategies for improving communication with other programs in order to expand learning opportunities. For this initiative, many strategies are intended to help the programs gather information that can guide them in determining what other strategies are needed to increase persistence. Some information-gathering strategies also allow programs to monitor the progress of their students and to assess improvements in persistence so that they can continually refine their approaches.

- **Instructional Strategies.**[3] These are aimed at enhancing programs' core instructional services in order to better engage students and encourage continued and frequent participation. Instructional strategies aim to find the best fit between learners' needs and learning styles and the program's offerings so that students will be more engaged in learning and will find it more rewarding to persist longer.

- **Operational Strategies.** These involve changes in program procedures to make activities more accessible to students and, thus, to make attendance more feasible. These types of strategies — such as extended hours or days of operation or additional locations — attempt to adjust the program's offerings to the lives and schedules of the students.

- **Support Strategies.** These are aimed at alleviating barriers to learner persistence, by providing either new or enhanced services. Some support strategies may address barriers caused by competing demands on students' lives; for example, students may lack child care or may not have adequate transportation. Other support strategies are less tangible and help reduce psychological obstacles to persistence, perhaps related to students' prior failures in formal education that undermined their self-confidence.

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[2]In prior LILAA reports and documents, these are called "informational strategies," but this new terminology more accurately conveys what these approaches involve.

[3]In prior LILAA reports and documents, these strategies are called "programmatic strategies," but this new terminology more accurately conveys the nature of these efforts.

The original concept for the project was that each program would seek advice and information from a variety of sources — including students and tutors — and would use what was learned to design strategies in each category; then the program would implement the strategies over a two-year period. The outcomes would be assessed by looking at student record data to analyze changes in participation and by observing changes in participants' experiences. The rest of this chapter presents not only the strategies that were originally proposed by the programs and the strategies that were later added but also a number of approaches that were already in place and that tend to be innate to adult library literacy programs, reflecting traditional ways to boost persistence. Through the LILAA initiative, many of these existing approaches were enhanced to better address problems of student persistence.

## Information-Gathering Strategies

As planned, many of the LILAA programs' information-gathering strategies are intended to inform the design and refinement of strategies in the other three categories. At the same time, many of these strategies were designed by the programs to provide ongoing sources of information to expand their knowledge, improve their persistence strategies, and monitor changes in outcomes.

### Early Formal Information-Gathering Methods

Early in the project, all the programs employed some type of formal information-gathering methods (for example, surveys, case studies, workshops, interviews, and focus groups) to inform the design of persistence strategies. These efforts were led either by program staff or by consultants. Some program directors and staff felt that the process was a learning experience, and they appreciated the surprises that emerged. More often, however, they felt that the findings simply confirmed what they already suspected. For example, in a focus group at the Queens Borough Public Library's program, staff and the persistence coordinator found that students felt they needed more emotional support (centering on issues of family and personal problems), which reinforced an earlier decision to put some of the program's resources into building a stronger sense of community.

At most programs, the formal research efforts suggested too many needed strategies or strategies that were difficult for the programs to undertake. For example, it would be very difficult for the New York Public Library's LILAA program to develop transportation subsidies for its students that would sustain them over a long period of time. Such supports would be costly and might threaten the relationship with the host library, which believes strongly in the principle of equal access and was not accustomed to helping other low-income patrons with transportation. Further, it would be difficult to develop criteria for establishing which students would be eligible for such subsidies. This program decided instead to ease transportation problems by

scheduling orientations at several branch libraries, rather than centralizing them. Other common concerns included the difficulty of collecting information from a representative group of students and the need to help students feel comfortable about revealing their problems and describing their expectations. To address such concerns and reduce bias in gathering information, one program asked students hypothetical questions, and others guaranteed anonymity.

Overall, few programs designed specific persistence strategies based directly on new information that was gathered formally at the start of the LILAA initiative. For the most part, the process was informative but did not yield new knowledge leading programs to alter their services radically. A more defined "action research" process — with specific expectations for seeking in-depth information about persistence barriers and reflecting on what was learned — might have led to insights producing additional innovative strategies that targeted particular barriers. Instead, the programs typically initiated a set of persistence strategies based on their own or a consultant's existing knowledge, while gleaning some ideas from student focus groups and from surveys that deepened their understanding of problems. Over time, staff "tinkered" with the strategies as they learned more.

### Upgrading Data Systems

In addition to the formal information gathering at the start of the LILAA project, the LILAA programs also enhanced ongoing data collection processes and electronic data systems in order to better track students' characteristics, attendance, goals, and test scores (in some cases). Though this upgrading was driven partly by the need for data for this study — data that have to be comparable to the National Reporting System (NRS) data that are collected by programs funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) — the library programs also benefit directly by having more detailed information about their students over the life of the study and beyond. Also, having a more comprehensive data system encouraged some programs to collect additional data for their own purposes. Besides asking more questions during intake, some programs also implemented additional literacy testing. For example, one library introduced administration of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

Although all nine of the library literacy programs had some type of data collection system in place prior to this study, most found it a challenge to collect more detailed and more frequent information from their students. The programs in the persistence study are small, and data systems and testing are expensive. Box 3.1 highlights issues encountered by the programs during the initial implementation phase.[4]

[4]The final report in 2003 will examine whether or not the programs resolve some of these issues.

**Box 3.1**

**Tracking Persistence: Challenges and Strategies**

With the LILAA programs serving approximately 50 to 200 students in any given month — all participating in a variety of activities — collecting, entering, and managing data on all these students is an enormous task. Following are some of the challenges that the library literacy programs face in collecting and managing the data for the persistence study, along with some strategies that the programs have implemented to address these challenges.

**Maintaining Students' Privacy.** An important tenet in the U.S. public library system is privacy. Libraries have traditionally been places where members of the community can go to learn, with relative anonymity. Therefore, collecting data on literacy students' backgrounds and activities while in the library (or in a center run by the library) can seem to contradict libraries' commitment to privacy. Although all information collected by program staff is kept completely confidential, both by the libraries and by the research team, some questions (such as employment status or hours spent working with a tutor or using a computer) are difficult to ask in a way that clearly respects students' privacy. Sensitivity helps, but program staff recognize that students do not always accurately account for their activities and may refuse to answer questions about their experiences, as is their right.

**Securing Tutors' Cooperation.** For many of the programs, collecting participation data on pair-tutoring is an ongoing challenge. Particularly for tutoring that takes place off-site, the main challenge is checking with tutors to ensure that they are recording information and relaying it to program staff. Some tutors may be unwilling to provide these data for any number of reasons, perhaps because they want to protect the privacy of their students, because they do not understand or agree with the importance of reporting the information, or because they stop volunteering with the program. Staff may try calling tutors to collect information that they have not received, which is very time-consuming, or they may try to collect the information directly from the students. No programs currently have systems in place that streamline the process of gathering information from multiple informants, but some have suggested or tried implementing a number of approaches to improve their chances of receiving data from tutors. Some send monthly E-mail reminders to tutors. Others have introduced incentives, such as gift certificates or recognition awards. Many programs also make an effort to inform tutors about the importance of data collection and of this evaluation.

(continued)

**Box 3.1 (continued)**

**Capturing Participation in Independent Activities.** In addition to structured literacy instruction, all the LILAA programs offer independent activities such as computer instruction, library research, or book borrowing, and capturing these activities is important for a comprehensive assessment of student persistence. However, aside from computer instruction, few independent activities are captured consistently. This means that persistence is consistently underestimated, both because students may continue to engage in literacy learning after they stop participating in tutoring or classes and because students likely spend many more hours working on literacy skills than the few hours a week they typically spend with a tutor or in a small-group. Programs have implemented a number of approaches to improve their assessment of participation in independent literacy activities. Most of these rely on students' self-reports. Programs encourage students to self-report all their literacy activities, and they make doing so as easy as possible. For example, several programs leave a sign-in/out sheet, have a punch-card system, or have installed sign-in/out software on the computers.

**Upgrading Technological Capacity.** The LILAA literacy programs entered the persistence study with a wide range of experience in using data management systems, but they all faced challenges in upgrading their processes, keeping them running smoothly over time, and ensuring that the data were sufficiently accurate and timely for the study. Besides getting the required hardware, they needed to learn how to set up and use the software to capture program activities. For some of the programs, this study's data collection needs coincided with other efforts to collect and report data for other funders or for internal uses, and all programs seemed to benefit from the new data management requirements and support. Staff at one of the two programs that developed databases from scratch commented that the new systems helped them learn who their students are. Other programs that were already using these systems were able to expand their use, moving beyond reports of program status to using the software for case management and other internal functions.

**Streamlining Data Entry.** Entering all the demographic, attendance, and other program data into a database can be very time-consuming. For busy staff who are dedicated to providing literacy services to students, the task of entering data for all students every month was an additional burden. In this regard, some database software was much more time-consuming than others. To ease the time burden of data entry, some programs designated a staff member to serve as a part-time data manager. Other programs designated a time for data entry — setting aside one day a month, for example, to enter all data collected on paper forms. The strategy of designating a person or a time for data entry appears to prevent severe backlogs from developing and produces data that are more useful and more reliable both for the programs and for the study.

### Participating in Site Visits and Conferences

All the LILAA programs took part in site visits to other LILAA programs — visits that centered on technical assistance and were arranged either independently or through the Illinois Literacy Resource and Development Center, an organization that provides technical assistance to the project. These visits allowed the staff from the host and the visiting sites to get to know one another better, and they provided concrete experiences of actually seeing another program and appreciating its different approaches. Program staff from each site also attended conferences for all LILAA grantees. These meetings were important opportunities for site staff to learn directly — through observation, discussion, and exchanges of materials — about each other's efforts to improve student persistence. For example, after a site visit to Oakland, the Greensboro program adopted Second Start's data system and decided to hire someone to manage its database, as is done in Oakland. Similarly, Redwood City's Project READ redesigned its student forms based on other programs' materials.

Unfortunately, some responses to these meetings also show their limits. The examples above of staff who reported learning from their peers at visits and conferences are offset by responses from staff who said that, after being exposed to other programs at the first conference, they did not learn much more from later gatherings or from the listservs set up to supplement these meetings. Some staff also felt that their own program's needs were unique, which limited how much they could learn from each other. A different design for the site visits and conferences — organized, for example, around specific issues and common problems — might have reduced the amount of show-and-tell and led to a more coherent professional dialogue that focused on problem-solving, continuing education, building coalitions, and financial support for the group. On the other hand, LILAA program staff did also say that the conferences focused attention on student persistence and helped create a sense of being in a collegial community. In addition, many staff attended national conferences that were highly beneficial to them, and they also participated in national listservs.

## Instructional Strategies

Because literacy instruction is the mission of the LILAA programs, the libraries in the persistence study introduced innovations to improve instruction and also developed strategies to align their instruction with students' needs. The seven most common strategies found in the LILAA programs are described below.

### Improving Student Orientations

When potential students first approach a library literacy program, they typically receive some form of orientation, either individually or in groups. Most orientations last an hour or two

and include a discussion of the program and a tour of its facilities. The sessions usually follow an intake and assessment procedure in which students provide information about themselves and explore their goals. Efforts to improve orientations often seek to reach out to a more diverse population, to introduce a stronger sense of community, and to provide a better picture of what to expect from the program. For example, the Glenwood program added an orientation in Spanish in order to better reach Greensboro's Hispanic community, and New York Public Library created a new set of orientation sessions to teach students basic academic skills and prepare them to enter a tutoring group. Other improvements address issues of scheduling and accommodating students who are waiting for tutors, in order to minimize the time between showing interest in the program and being able to attend an orientation. Project READ, for example, expanded its programming to accommodate new students and launched an intensive effort to reduce its waiting list. Better orientations might encourage more potential students to enroll in services or to start studying with more enthusiasm and preparation. At the same time, if orientation provides a realistic view of instruction, some potential students might decide that it is not a good time to begin studying or that the program does not fit their needs well.

### Improving Classes and Group Tutoring

Most of the library literacy programs began by providing "pair tutoring" (individual instruction by a volunteer tutor) and continued this service consistently throughout the LILAA initiative. As a strategy to address low student persistence, all the programs also begun adding classes and small-group tutoring; some did so even before the persistence study began. These options not only allow programs to serve more students but also add an element of group interaction that is missing from pair tutoring and computer labs, which are more individualized. Group interaction may support persistence, since most students value the social exchange. In addition, when tutors miss scheduled sessions, students can study with each other. Group tutoring often takes place on-site (in contrast to much pair tutoring, which can occur away from the program), and so staff can monitor instruction and provide technical assistance to tutors immediately, if the need arises. The classes also create opportunities to use professional teachers and to focus on students' particular needs or interests, such as spelling or poetry.

### Improving Tutor Training and Recruitment

All the programs have sought to improve tutor training as a result of the LILAA initiative. The improvements include longer training, linking tutor training to student orientation, developing or improving training manuals, and focusing on technology and greater sensitivity to cultural issues and students' goals. Programs have also provided more tutor support. New York Public Library's tutor training was completely revamped through a participatory staff process, leading to standardization of information and materials across sites, centralizing locations and scheduling for training, formalizing and better organizing tutor intake and procedures, extend-

ing the hours and duration of tutor training, and raising the quality of instruction. The trainings have become more structured and systematic, and tutors now have new training manuals. Also, during the information-gathering activities at the start of the project, programs surveyed tutors to find out what support they needed. This led to more technical content in the training, such as how to teach reading and writing or how to support conversation and integrate cultural issues when working with ESOL students. Since tutors are being asked to report more accurately on the activities in their groups or one-on-one sessions, some of the added training also focuses on administrative matters. Programs are stricter about attendance at tutor training, and the training is now used to improve tutor selection and their commitment to the program.

Longer and better-designed tutor training supports student persistence by improving the experience and the relationships that students have in the program. Staff believe that improved training can support *tutor persistence* as well — which is another critical factor in student persistence. The success of tutor training depends on the volunteers who come forward to be trained and on their motivation and willingness to learn from the staff on an ongoing basis. During the initial implementation phase of the persistence study, all the programs have also been experimenting with ways to recruit tutors who are more like their students or who are highly sensitized to any ethnic or linguistic issues that the students may have. One program recruits college students who are Spanish majors and are interested in Latino culture.

### Standardizing Instruction

As part of the effort to improve literacy instruction, all the programs in the LILAA persistence study have worked to standardize instructional services within their library system. Standardization can improve the services by ensuring that every student's instruction is similar in content and quality. Further, for programs that have multiple sites, standardization should make it easier for students to move from one site to another. Moreover, standardization can provide some economies of scale related to tutor training and the development of program materials.

### Documenting and Tracking Students' Goals

Before the LILAA initiative, literacy students' goals were assessed only informally, if at all. All the library programs now ask students about their goals at intake, and these goals are added to a program's data system. This is an important strategy for improving student persistence, because it helps the programs meet students' needs and it gives students the chance to develop a plan against which progress can be measured. In the initial implementation phase, some programs were able to directly connect students' goals and assessments. For example, the Queens Borough Public Library's Adult Learning Centers used a participatory staff process to created a system of benchmark goals that focus on the development of reading skills. Most sites, however, do not yet have a clear system for linking instructional choices to goals; during this

stage of implementation, most of the programs were establishing goal-tracking and were not yet focused on linking students' goals to the curriculum.

One example of a goal-setting strategy — which evolved out of collaboration at a LILAA conference — is the adoption of a form used to document students' goals during the intake process. The form lists examples of academic goals (such as getting a GED or reading better) and of life goals (such as reading to a child or passing a driving test). The Glenwood program is helping students develop a "learning contract," which lists expectations about the time and energy that a tutor can give to help the student reach stated goals within the boundaries of their formal relationship. Goal-setting is discussed further in Chapter 4.

### Addressing Learning Disabilities

If a literacy program is not sufficiently equipped from the outset to help students who have learning disabilities, the program is unlikely to retain those students. Therefore, instructional strategies that are designed to identify and serve students who have learning disabilities are essential to improving persistence. One program, Project READ, hired a consultant who developed a programmed instructional system to help tutors teach adult students who have learning disabilities. The consultant provided materials and training, and the program has assigned one staff member to be a Special Needs coordinator, who works with the consultant to identify students who are considered "learning-disabled." Other programs spent the year deciding whether or not to tailor instruction to this population and, if so, which were the best, most practical ways to implement specialized instruction and curricula.

The data collected for the LILAA achievement study (see Appendix C) confirm that most of the English-speaking literacy students have very low reading scores and might benefit from programs that focus especially on learning disabilities. During the initial implementation phase, only Project READ addressed this need in an organized way, by designating a cadre of its better tutors and literacy instructors to serve learning-disabled students. This approach might show the way for other programs that rely on volunteers.

### Administering Student Assessments

More useful and regular assessment of student progress is a way to encourage students and to focus instruction. New York Public Library and Project READ have turned to norm- and criterion-referenced tests, such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and other assessment instruments like the Bader Reading and Language Inventory,[5] which are intended to be

[5]This is a flexible battery of tests designed to quickly screen children, teens, and adult students in a nonthreatening manner. It was developed by Lois A. Bader at Michigan State University and is published by Prentice-Hall.

used at regular intervals and to supplement placement tests like the Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ) test, or other types of informal assessments that are usually given at intake. Many of the programs try to reassess the students within designated periods (every six months, for example), which has proved to be worthwhile but is also labor intensive for staff. Second Start hired a part-time consultant to reassess students. One aspect of the LILAA research effort — the achievement study (Appendix C) — may also provide new ideas for strengthening assessment; it takes a reading components approach that focuses on students' strengths and weaknesses and provides useful information for instruction.

## Operational Strategies

The LILAA programs focused on operational strategies intended to create more opportunities for increased student participation. These were perceived to be an important support for persistence, especially for students who could only attend at certain times, and to provide increased access to diverse instructional modes, like computer-assisted study. Two types of operational strategies are discussed here.

### Extending of Hours of Operation

The information-gathering activities undertaken by the programs during the planning phase of the project identified the need for more or different hours of operation, and some LILAA programs extended their hours in the first year. For example, New York Public Library's Fordham branch extended morning offerings in order to better serve mothers whose children are in school. Oakland Public Library's Second Start program also extended its evening hours, to give students greater access to the computer lab. Greensboro Public Library's Glenwood branch created a "staggered hour" system to serve students who work in shifts. On the other hand, Queens Borough Public Library considered limiting its hours as part of a move to serve students better with existing resources and to help build community among both students and tutors by creating common times and a common space to gather.

### Expanding and Upgrading Computer Labs

All the LILAA programs expanded and upgraded their computer labs during the former phase of the project (before 1999) and have continued to do that during the current phase. Additional access to computers is considered a support to student persistence because computers also allow for self-study when instruction and tutors are not available. Moreover, many students are interested in learning about computers. The programs' computer labs range in size from 5 to 20 workstations, but students often have access to computers in the libraries' main facilities as well.

Acquiring more computers and installing new software has been the easy part of lab expansion. There have also been a number of related challenges; for example, some programs do not have anyone on staff who has technical expertise. The programs usually have to train staff and tutors to use the computers and to integrate them into instruction plans that serve students' needs. Some of the labs are staffed with paid technical assistants or college mentors, and students often help each other. The programs now have enough experience that they can develop a vision and plans to integrate computers into their services and instruction.

## Support Strategies

The LILAA programs' staffs are well aware of literacy students' many barriers to persistence, and they believe that it is essential to develop effective support strategies for adult learners. But most also see limitations on their ability to provide such services, and some question even whether they should attempt to do so, given their position as part of a public library. Broader library concerns about potential liability in the event of problems and about equity among all library patrons constrain the variety and scope of the services that they can provide. Many programs are more comfortable offering students referrals to other organizations in the community. The LILAA programs tend to follow the model of most K-12 and postsecondary institutions, which provide some limited nonacademic support but typically do so informally. This section briefly discusses strategies for offering literacy students referrals to support services and for providing direct, in-house assistance.

### Increasing Referrals for Assistance

Most of the LILAA programs provide adult learners with some type of referrals to government or community agencies that offer services relating to welfare, criminal justice, food, health care, and substance abuse. Some programs have developed collaborative relationships with social service agencies in the communities they serve, and they often receive reciprocal referrals. In response to the LILAA initiative, all the programs are looking for ways to build a larger network of service providers to help their students persist. Second Start has a relationship with an agency that refers potential students who are in the criminal justice system, but this type of relationship is uncommon among the referral networks of the LILAA programs. Most referrals take the form of a name, phone number, and address — which is often all that staff can provide. During the first year, the persistence coordinator for the Queens Borough Public Library Adult Learning Centers started to design a system that will allow site directors to refer students to agencies that can help them with support services.

### Offering In-House Assistance

Although the LILAA programs rely heavily on referrals to address students' needs for support services, they also provide some forms of direct support that address barriers to persistence. These services include food, transportation subsidies, child care, and informal counseling. For example, Second Start provides students with bus tokens or passes. Greensboro developed a process for determining transportation needs, and eligible students receive bus tokens only if they request them.

## Conclusion

In the initial implementation phase of the LILAA initiative, the nine library literacy programs in the persistence study gained a new focus on the persistence of adult learners. All the programs embarked on planning and implementing a variety of strategies. But as the year progressed, they found that the heightened emphasis on student persistence was the most significant innovation in the LILAA project. As the programs gathered information on barriers to persistence and devised and implemented strategies to overcome them, they encountered a variety of challenges. The challenges became learning opportunities, however, and allowed the programs to better understand the varying and complex needs of their diverse student populations and to assess the feasibility of providing certain services, particularly support services.

Most important, perhaps, is that the programs gained a better overall connection with their students and came to recognize that persistence issues make an effective lens through which to discover and examine program enhancements on multiple levels. Moreover, as a result of the LILAA initiative and the heightened desire to track and understand student persistence, the programs placed particular attention on improving their data systems. The enormity of this task also presented new challenges, but the programs succeeded in establishing or upgrading valuable data systems that track students' participation and literacy activities more precisely than ever and that provided the data for the analyses in Chapter 2. (Appendix C describes some of the data issues related to the persistence study.)

Chapter 4

# What Are the Early Lessons from the LILAA Persistence Study?

Since the launch of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative in January 2000, the LILAA programs in this study have heightened their focus on student persistence and have planned and implemented strategies to improve persistence, either by enhancing program elements already in place or by introducing new processes or systems. Chapter 3 reviewed the progress that the programs have made in applying these strategies, and this chapter explores early lessons emerging from their experience and suggests additional steps that library literacy programs could take to support persistence among adult literacy students.[1]

Three main areas have emerged for focused attention: personal goals, sponsorship, and respect and care for adult students. This chapter discusses the linkage of each factor to persistence, gives an overview of what the LILAA programs are already doing in these areas, and presents some early lessons for improving student persistence.

## Personal Goals

Some adult learners persist in a literacy program because they enjoy the experience, but many do so because they are driven by personal goals, which can take many forms. The literature on persistence suggests that literacy programs' efforts to assist students in defining and achieving goals are essential for supporting persistence.

Students' goals tend to fall into two categories: instrumental and transformational. *Instrumental goals* typically indicate specific outcomes that are essential for achieving longer-term aspirations. Examples include passing the General Educational Development (GED) exam, getting a driver's license, or being able to read job-related materials, such as blueprints or building codes. Instrumental goals may also involve incremental objectives — such as learning phonics, vocabulary, or the alphabet — within a broader goal of improving literacy skills. Attaining an instrumental goal often leads to the development of a new goal, which encourages ongoing participation in the program and, therefore, persistence.

*Transformational goals* entail broader changes that students want to achieve, such as changes in self-perceptions or identity, major life skills, psychological states, and social or work

[1]This discussion is based on in-depth interviews with students, tutors, and staff as well as a review of the literature on adult student persistence.

roles. These tend to be intrinsic to the student and are described as enhancing the quality of the student's life on a deeply personal level. During interviews, many literacy students told stories of major events in their lives that propelled them toward changing. Some had overcome substance abuse, left abusive relationships, or immigrated to the United States. Others hit an employment barrier because of low literacy skills. Such pivotal events created a desire for self-improvement, which led to enrollment in a literacy program. Many students in the study said that they were transforming themselves from who they had been to who they want to become, and they reported that they viewed the library literacy program as part of this transition. These students came to the library, in part, to find a community that would support their new identities.

Although some students' goals may be considered unrealistic by program staff, the students may actually be describing a transformational goal. For example, students whose literacy skills are extremely low may state that their goal is to pass the GED exam. For some, the desire to pass this test may, in fact, be a transformational goal that expresses a desire to change identity — to become a person who has a GED and therefore is "educated."

### Mixing Instrumental and Transformational Goals

**Elena.** Elena's immediate goal is to pass a licensing exam that is required in order to become a pharmacists' assistant, and her tutor is helping her build basic skills and prepare for the exam. Elena's long-term dream is to become a lawyer who defends women who are trying to leave an abusive relationship, just as she did in an earlier stage of her life. Both of Elena's goals — the first more instrumental, and the latter more transformational — motivate her to persist in literacy studies.

Joe. When Joe entered the literacy program, he just wanted to improve his reading and writing. Now he is reading romance stories, surfing the Internet for sites about wrestling, and writing autobiographical essays. Being able to handle all these materials signifies that Joe has achieved his first instrumental goals. After working closely with his group and tutor, he decided that he wanted to get a driver's license and a GED certificate, but he was nervous about passing the two tests. In the course of his studies, Joe became more aware of his growing dreams and needs, including learning to read and write, getting an education, and, someday, having a family. He said: "I just want to be proud of more things for myself, and — family. That will make me proud."

### Efforts to Support Goal-Setting at the LILAA Programs

Most students in the persistence study said that they were asked about goals when they entered their LILAA program, and they appreciated the informal discussions with tutors and staff about their goals and the steps to attain them. However, some students had difficulty articulating their goals. Others, who were in the middle of a crisis, found it difficult even to think about goals. To help students consider and set personal goals, program staff interviewed students using a checklist of goals that are in line with the mission of the initiative. Also, as mentioned in Chapter 3, program staff and tutors did not have models for how to link goals directly to instruction. Though some tutors did achieve a link (especially in one-on-one tutoring), most tutors need training and technical assistance to accomplish this.

### Lessons About Personal Goals and Student Persistence

Besides the strategies that the LILAA programs already have in place, the following are early lessons about focusing more on students' goals and linking them to increases in persistence.

- **Encourage an ongoing, reflective dialogue with students about their goals, starting at intake and continuing throughout program participation.**

An ongoing dialogue about goals might help students keep the source of their motivation in mind and, therefore, might promote greater persistence. Frequent discussions about goals also send a message that staff and tutors are interested in seeing students achieve their goals. A discussion of goals should be sensitive to the feelings of the student and should allow for the identification of both instrumental and transformational goals. Making sure that students feel comfortable in exploring their goals could also support persistence. Library literacy programs could view themselves as what the Adult Development research team refers to as "holding environments": supportive, stable places that are available to the students at any stage in their learning and that also recognize their goals for change.[2] Such an environment might help students make the transition to the next stage in their lives. Further, programs could promote peer interaction, thus providing students with support by being among others who are making similar life changes.

Staff and tutors could also encourage students to reflect more on their goals — rather than merely naming them — as a way to develop a deeper sense of meaning. Goal discussions might be more productive if the students begin with an examination of their lives and dreams, rather than with a list of potential goals. The list then might be a good second step in this dialogue. Discussions among groups of students can help broaden and deepen an initial understanding of goals and can show students that others may be pursuing similar goals. For students whose goals are not yet clear, instruction could focus on their interests and lives. Dialogue journals, reflective discussions,

[2]Kegan et al., 2001.

written personal histories, and the reading of student stories can also support the process of goal clarification. Most tutors and staff need training to coach students through such conversations.

### Linking Instruction to Goals

If the ongoing discussion of goals leads to changes in instruction, students' motivation may become stronger, particularly if they see progress toward achieving their goals. Tutors can be trained to teach skills within the context of any instrumental or transformational goal. For example, a class about a particular skill that is often an instrumental goal for students can also reveal a path for progress. In terms of transformational goals, some tutors already have students reading materials from home, presenting their opinions, stating their feelings, and exchanging ideas about issues. These approaches to get students more intensively engaged in their learning could lead to a stronger commitment to the program and could improve persistence.

## Sponsors and Sponsorship

Many potential students are unaware of the educational opportunities that exist in their communities, or they may not think of education as a way to make positive changes in their lives. Others may want to pursue an education but are intimidated by the institutional context of formal education. These potential students often depend on the help of a sponsor who knows more about educational opportunities and introduces them to a learning program. Sponsors also can play a key role in helping students persist in their education after they enter a program. They help students endure feelings of frustration, difficulties with self-study and homework, and changes in tutors. They also provide continued support to students who have to leave a program and may encourage them to return when they are able. Sponsors provide various kinds of encouragement and help: material support (cash for lunch or transportation), emotional support (encouragement to attend the program and study every day), literacy support (document assistance), informational support (information about job certification programs), or symbolic support (the memory of a parent who valued education and who instilled this value in the student).

Literacy students have different types of sponsors, who may intervene on their own or be called upon by the student. *Personal sponsors* include relatives, partners, friends, and coworkers. *Official sponsors* are professionals who are assigned to provide institutional support to the student; they include social workers, parole officers, welfare-to-work counselors, professional literacy staff, librarians, and teachers. *Intermediate sponsors* are associated with a social, religious, or educational organization but are in a less formal relationship with the student; examples include pastors, sponsors or fellow members of 12-step programs, volunteer tutors, and other students.

A personal sponsor (for example, a relative who gives material, emotional, and informational support) typically offers more pervasive and more comprehensive support than an official sponsor (such as a caseworker who provides a referral to a program), who gives intermittent and targeted support within a limited time frame. Intermediate sponsors are in the middle of this continuum; they are involved with students for a longer period of time than official sponsors, but they are not integrated into students' lives as personal sponsors are. A student's connection to an intermediate sponsor is not encumbered by the kinds of demands that friends and relatives make on each other or by the institutional objectives of official sponsors.

The lack of personal demands along with the longer period of connection may make intermediate sponsors particularly beneficial to improving student persistence. Intermediate sponsors may become both friend and mentor, provide emotional and spiritual support, and help the student with everyday problems. Intermediate sponsors are less likely than official or personal sponsors to provide material support. Their relationships are more distant than those of personal sponsors, and they are not as connected to resources as official sponsors often are. However, the intermediate sponsor may serve as an important role model for the student.

Earlier LILAA reports identified support from family, friends, teachers, and fellow students as important to persistence.[3] This report moves to the next step by suggesting that specific persons and groups can be key providers of certain forms of support. Sponsors can provide a link to social services, encouragement to continue studying, role models of success, emotional support, exposure to new ways of using literacy skills, and supplemental literacy instruction and practice. Sponsors support persistence at the program site and in the daily life of the student, serving as important but often-hidden keys to participation and persistence.

### Sponsors Come from Many Places

**Melissa.** Melissa, a coworker in Rod's family business, noticed that Rod had problems reading, and she offered to tutor him. Because she was one of the first people to talk with him about reading problems, Rod was more open about his literacy situation at work. Melissa also called Project READ and connected him with the program. Melissa is a personal sponsor who is part of Rod's life and who has shown that she is willing and able to support his persistence in literacy study by offering informational, literacy, and emotional support.

**Mark.** When Mark was alone in the store where he worked, he was afraid that he would make a mistake on the forms that he had to fill out. His wife encour-

[3]Comings, Cuban, Bos, and Taylor, 2001; Comings, Parrella, and Soricone, 1999.

aged him to join the library literacy program. But Bill, his sponsor in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), felt that Mark needed to reduce stress in his life and focus on his drinking problem before taking on the task of improving his literacy skills. Bill encouraged Mark to go through one year of recovery and then reenter the literacy program. When Mark returned to the program, his tutor encouraged him to use AA materials as a focus of study. Mark connects his persistence in the program with his persistence in AA: "I really want to stay here as long as it takes," he says. "I want to be able to stick this out like I'm doing with AA." Bill is an example of an intermediate sponsor, an individual who is part of a voluntary self-help organization. Though Bill is not a member of Mark's family, he does have a long-term helping relationship with him through AA.

## Efforts to Build Sponsorship at the LILAA Programs

Most of the literacy students who were interviewed for the persistence study mentioned a sponsor or several sponsors who made them aware of educational opportunities and who encouraged and helped them to begin program participation. Though the LILAA programs do identify the roles of sponsors as important in supporting student persistence, they initially did not seem to be aware of their students' sponsors, or — if they were aware — there was no formal process for reaching out to sponsors. Now, however, the programs view tutors as assuming some sponsorship roles, rather than being disengaged from students' lives. Most programs seek tutors who are willing to support students' learning efforts, to advocate for them as needed, and to provide instruction that is attuned to students' needs. Some program staff also play sponsorship roles through informal advocacy, assistance in filling out forms, referrals to social services, and calling students to check on how they are doing. But, as is the case with some tutors, staff members often do not want to become deeply involved in students' lives, out of concern for being intrusive. Similarly, some students do not want relationships that make them feel dependent, and, in some cases, sponsorship may discourage participation.

## Lessons About Sponsorship and Student Persistence

- **Promote sponsorship as an activity that fits easily into the mission of libraries as part of a network of community-based services.**

Libraries have always promoted literacy and supported their patrons by providing community information, some direct assistance, and referrals.[4] Referrals may also help literacy students find individuals who may become sponsors. Moreover, students in literacy programs

[4]Estabrook and Lakner (2000) found that 90 percent of the libraries in their sample were referring potential student to literacy programs; this referral process is part of the institutional sponsorship role.

may have greater access to library-based supports, because of the equal access principle whereby public libraries try to stay open most days of the week and for long hours each day.

Many libraries do not provide direct instruction in literacy but do provide referrals to literacy programs. Given the importance of sponsorship in supporting student persistence — as demonstrated by the data emerging from the LILAA study — staff in such libraries could expand their sponsorship efforts to include persistence support for students who are involved in self-study or in other literacy programs outside the library. Libraries that do provide direct literacy instruction might extend their sponsorship role to students who study in outside programs, which might have greater difficulty attracting sponsors.

One challenge in having sponsors link students with social services is the need to keep referral information and contacts current and relevant. Libraries could enlist knowledgeable community members to volunteer their time and to work with reference librarians to expand their referral services. Some volunteers might also act as sponsors for adult literacy students.

Libraries could also provide training and support to volunteers who play sponsorship roles. Sponsorship could well be seen as less of a commitment than tutoring; some might find it less daunting to provide "moral support" than direct literacy instruction. More library patrons might volunteer to assist the program in this way, and some might eventually become tutors. Volunteer sponsors could facilitate reading activities, help with homework and self-study, and assist in using library resources for information and referrals to social services. Some of the activities that libraries now undertake to encourage children to improve their language skills could be adapted for adults; creative staff might find new ways to provide diverse types of support for adult learners.

- **Reach out to all types of sponsors, and involve them in the program.**

Library literacy programs could do more to learn about their students' sponsors and involve them in the program. Rather than relying on casual chats during intake, assessment, and classes, program staff could question new students about their sponsors and could help students develop strategies to engage sponsors in helping them persist in their studies. Programs could involve some sponsors directly in services and could provide training to help sponsors expand their support of students.

Because most sponsors are part of social networks outside the library, formal links between the literacy program and these networks might spread the sponsorship role into more parts of students' lives and might bring more people from these networks into the program. A partnership among sponsors, students, tutors, and staff might make the program experience more direct for students, which could increase their chances of persisting — and of achieving their goals.

- **Expand staff members' roles in sponsorship.**

Some literacy program staff and tutors are already playing sponsorship roles for students, but a conscious effort to expand such activities might develop new ways to support adult learners. For example, some program staff — who are often former or current students — might call inactive students who have dropped out of the program to find out why they left and encourage them to come back. Staff and tutors might make it a point to talk with active students regularly, as a way to encourage them to persist. Developing a variety of peer support methods and opportunities is another way to strengthen the program's sponsorship roles.

Although many literacy programs do connect students to services they need, the staff might develop strategies to identify what kind of support services are needed, rather than waiting for students to come forward and seek help. A proactive approach would require staff to be trained in counseling and group dynamics, in order to provide safe opportunities for students to share their problems. Alternatively, a social service agency could play this assessment role, in collaboration with program staff.

## Respect and Care for Adult Students

The principles that guide library services emphasize respect and care for adult students. Although this common quality may not "look" the same in every library literacy program, it defines their approach. Library literacy programs mostly serve students who are below the fifth-grade reading level. In fact, some students come to library programs after state- and federally funded programs rejected them because their literacy skills were too low. These and other students may feel isolated and marginalized in their communities, may be disabled, or may have histories of abuse or trauma. Such students are often the hardest-to-reach populations in a community, and they are more likely to respond well to informal, small learning environments. For students who fail in formal schooling, the libraries provide an opportunity to learn in a less threatening environment. The more comfortable students feel, the more likely they are to persist.

### Respecting Students' Needs

**Nan.** Nan receives a lot of help from her tutor, whom she acknowledged with a letter of thanks in a book of student writing. When she has problems with her husband, Nan feels comfortable talking with a female staff member, who listens carefully and helps her resolve family conflicts. Sometimes, when a baby-sitter is not available, the staff take care of her 6-year-old. When Nan leaves for home after the program twice a week, she says that she feels "like a million dollars."

**Amy.** Amy's tutor, Mary, brings romance novels to their tutoring sessions at Amy's apartment. Mary knows that these books will be interesting to Amy because the two women have had deep personal conversations. Amy is often homebound and sometimes fearful of leaving her house, but Mary gives her constant encouragement to be assertive and try new things. The student and tutor compare their life stories and even talk about their marriages.

### Respect and Care for Students at the LILAA Programs

The nine library literacy programs that are part of the LILAA persistence study treat their adult students with respect and attempt to provide caring, personalized environments for them. Many students expressed their appreciation for this attitude, and some cited it as contrasting with their experiences in programs at community colleges and local education agencies, which they viewed as more administrative-oriented and less personal. The LILAA programs try to represent the cultures of the people they serve. All the programs have reading materials and decorations that reflect student cultures, as well as some staff and tutors who share those cultures. Students are given personal recognition through learning celebrations and booklets that feature their writings. The LILAA programs offer an opportunity for all students to feel socially integrated into a mainstream institution — sometimes for the first time in their lives.

Students in the LILAA programs take part in open discussions about their ideas and feelings with tutors, other students, and program staff. These conversations take place while working in the computer labs, reading their own writing to tutors and other students, and expressing their opinions about what they are reading in a class. Students encourage one another to speak in classes. This level of dialogue is much greater than in most literacy programs, which are focused more on skill development. Many students expressed in their writing and in interviews that this program made them feel for the first time that they "came first" within a mainstream institution.

The LILAA programs appear to have a strong commitment and an ability to provide a positive environment and sense of community, which should be supportive to student persistence. Yet even a positive support can have a negative effect as well. Staff mentioned, for example, that some students have been in the program for a long time but have made little progress. These students feel at home in the program, and they persist because they enjoy being part of this community and its social activities; but they may not be focusing enough on literacy goals.

It is not always easy to maintain a positive learning environment. Some tutors become more involved in students' lives than they want to, and so they stop tutoring. Some tutors are not culturally sensitive and may offend their students. The free expression that students are encouraged to demonstrate in the programs may conflict with library policy, since libraries value a

quiet atmosphere. Even with such limitations, however, the environment of these library literacy programs is usually a positive support to student persistence.

### Lessons About Community and Student Persistence

- **Cultivate a strong sense of community for all students.**

The persistence of literacy students is enhanced when they feel that their program acknowledges and respects their affective sides and their cultures. The library programs might consider formal staff training in diversity issues and communication skills to ensure an even more supportive and accepting environment. A safe space that offers continuous care and respect makes students feel more comfortable about expressing themselves and pursuing their goals, and they will keep coming back. This kind of environment is especially important for students who have very low literacy levels.

## Lessons for Other Libraries

The foundation for improving student persistence in a library literacy program is a positive relationship between the program and students. This chapter explores three supports that build such a foundation when they focus instruction on the personal goals of students, promote a sponsorship network for students, and treat students with care and respect. These early lessons from the LILAA persistence study provide insights into how libraries can connect to students in ways that support participation and persistence in learning, even among literacy students who are not in library programs. In fact, libraries have features — such as a community identity, equal access policies, and an institutional philosophy of accommodating the personal needs of patrons — that make them good venues to support the persistence of a variety of community members. The LILAA project will continue to explore the strengths of the libraries in the persistence study and will identify additional strengths that can help build or improve persistence in a literacy program.

## What's Next in the LILAA Persistence Study?

The findings of this interim report set the stage for further analysis to be presented in a final report scheduled for the fall of 2003. That report will focus on five questions:

1. *What are the key factors supporting and inhibiting participation in adult literacy programs?* What are the implications of these factors for the design of strategies to improve learner persistence?

2. *Over time, how did the sites in the persistence study change their operations to support student persistence more effectively?* What innovations were

strengthened or put in place during the second and third year of the initiative? What operational lessons emerged as programs worked to support improved persistence?

3. *As the reforms took effect, did student persistence improve over time?* Did learners who entered the LILAA programs during this later period persist longer or participate more intensely? Were there differences among types of students? Were there differences across the sites?

4. *Are there types of innovations that appear to be especially promising as ways to improve student persistence?* What efforts and resources were needed to put these innovations in place? What are the implications for future program design and operations?

5. *What is the relationship between participation in library literacy services and improved literacy skills?* What were the gains in literacy achievement test scores between the initial testing of students and a follow-up test? Did students who participated more in services show greater gains? Were there types of students who showed especially strong gains? Who showed little or no gains? What are the implications for program design?

The upcoming research will also explore how library literacy programs fit within the broader adult education system.

Each of these questions breaks new ground for program operations and research on adult literacy. The answers will help program operators and funders more effectively serve adults who face serious barriers to full participation in the nation's economy and civic life.

## Appendix A

# The Five Libraries Participating in the LILAA Persistence Study

The five libraries in the LILAA persistence study illustrate a portion of the diversity of the library literacy programs in the United States, both in setting and in the students they serve. Each library has shown organizational stability and has leaders who are interested in making changes to enhance student persistence. These programs are not intended to be a representative sample of all library literacy programs, but they instead can illustrate what happens when experienced programs make persistence a focus, receive special support to enhance services, and are part of a special effort to monitor progress and assess effects on students. The following brief descriptions provide background information about the study sites and the variety of settings, services, and students. Some of the five libraries have multiple literacy programs operating out of branch libraries, and these are included in this research, bringing the total to nine literacy programs.[1]

## Greensboro Public Library

The Greensboro Public Library's literacy programs evolved from a community effort to address the needs of adults with low literacy skills. This resulted in Literacy 2000, a collaborative plan supported by the library, Guilford Technical Community College, and Reading Connections (a nonprofit agency supporting one-on-one tutoring), and other community agencies. The literacy programs that were started through Literacy 2000 are located at two of Greensboro Public Library's nine branches, one of which (Glenwood) relies on Americorps volunteers for many of its staff members.

- **Chavis.** Also known as the Lifelong Learning Branch, the Chavis branch offers adult students afternoon and evening classes in preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) exam, taught by teachers from the local community college. The program also has a computer lab and gives instruction in word-processing and E-mail.

- **Glenwood.** The Glenwood branch is in a working-class neighborhood that has attracted many refugees and immigrants from all over the world. The library is housed in a modern, sunny building that is a source of pride to the community. It offers small-group instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), family literacy classes, a computer lab, and a collection of foreign language and multicultural reading materials.

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[1]The five libraries use somewhat different terminology in naming their overall local LILAA effort and the activities at specific branch libraries. For ease of exposition, this report uses the label "library" to identify the five LILAA grantees in the persistence study, and it uses the label "program" to identify specific sites where literacy services are delivered.

## New York Public Library

New York Public Library (NYPL) has a long history of providing adult literacy services. Since the nineteenth century, NYPL branches have helped immigrants assimilate into the local community. Immigrants still come to the NYPL branches for English instruction, preparation to pass the citizenship test, and reading materials in their own language. NYPL provides literacy services through the Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs) at 9 of its 85 branches. The CRWs — funded primarily by the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI) — target adults at the lowest levels of literacy. Although the CRWs still serve many new immigrants, the focus of NYCALI is currently on literacy for English-speaking adults. The wide array of ethnic groups and nationalities served by the CRWs is reflected in the diversity of program staff and in the learning materials. The LILAA persistence study is focused on three of the CRWs.

- **Fordham.** The Fordham branch is in a densely populated, thriving business district in the Bronx and houses the CRW in several rooms in the back of the library. The program serves approximately 150 students at any given time. The students participate in small-group instruction in the evenings and/or in tutoring sessions held throughout the day — most of which are led by volunteers. Students also have access to a computer lab, where they can use the Internet, E-mail, and independently work on literacy activities and educational software.

- **Wakefield.** Housing one of NYPL's oldest CRWs, the Wakefield branch is located in a residential neighborhood also in the Bronx. The program serves approximately 100 students — mostly Afro-Caribbean adults — many of whom live within walking distance of the library. Students participate in small-group sessions and in computer study. The CRW is located in the basement of the library and has a computer lab, job search resources, and book collections.

- **Seward Park.** The Seward Park branch is located on Manhattan's Lower East Side, near Chinatown, but because of ongoing renovations since 2002, the program has temporarily moved to the Tompkins Street branch. The CRW serves Chinese, Puerto-Rican, African-American, and Afro-Caribbean students. Approximately 80 students participate in small-group tutoring and study in the computer lab. The CRW also has an extensive collection of multicultural materials.

## Oakland Public Library

Second Start — Oakland Public Library's adult literacy program — started in 1984 and is a small, community-based alternative program with classroom instruction and one-on-one tutoring. Housed in a downtown office building, Second Start's multiethnic staff offer an intensive and personalized curriculum in math, writing, and spelling as well as instruction in stress reduction. The classes are taught by professional instructors; some classes have a fixed schedule, while others are open-entry, open-exit. Second Start also offers a computer-assisted literacy program, with more than 20 computers. The majority of Second Start's funding comes from the City of Oakland, with some additional support from private sources. In the center's informal meeting room, free food donated by neighborhood restaurants is often available. Nearly 150 volunteers serve as one-on-one tutors both in-house and off-site. Several students have been hired as staff, and the program makes efforts to share decision-making with its students.

## Queens Borough Public Library

Queens Borough Public Library is among the nation's oldest and largest library systems and serves one of the most diverse populations. The adult literacy program, founded in 1977, has its roots in earlier library-based programs that provided education to immigrants. Currently, 6 of the library's 62 branches support Adult Learning Centers (ALCs), which are funded through the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), other government programs, and foundations. The ALCs enroll more than 2,500 adults each year, offering ESOL, pre-GED, and basic literacy instruction as well as computer classes, self-study with video- and audiotapes, literacy collections, and a student-writing journal entitled *The Open Door*. Three of the six ALCs are included in the LILAA persistence study.

- **Central.** The Central branch's ALC serves about 300 adult students in the Jamaica section of Queens. Volunteers lead small-group tutoring. Students also use a computer lab that has Internet access and self-study materials.

- **Flushing.** The Flushing branch is the largest in the Queens system and enrolls approximately 500 adult literacy students each year. Located in a commercial district of an area populated by immigrants from all over the world, the ALC provides ESOL and basic literacy study to students mainly of Asian descent. The program also serves many drop-in clients who are seeking social service referrals and resources.

- **Rochdale Village.** The Rochdale Village branch houses a smaller program that serves about 100 students. It is located in a middle- and working-class neighborhood and serves mostly African-American and Afro-Caribbean students. The ALC is housed in one room at the back of the library and of-

fers small-group instruction, computer access, and a large collection of literacy materials.

## Redwood City Public Library

Project READ, in Redwood City, California, serves approximately 200 adults who have low literacy skills. More than 180 volunteer tutors work with these adult students either one-on-one or in small groups. The program also has five computers and provides help in using them. Two-thirds of the students are Hispanic, and many do not have a high school diploma or GED. Project READ serves a variety of other populations, including children and teens in the community, people with learning disabilities, and adults in a local prison. The program receives funding through the library's general fund and receives additional funding and resources from individuals, businesses, and foundations.

Appendix B

# Samples Used in the LILAA Persistence Study

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## The LILAA Persistence Study

### Appendix Table B.1

### Samples Used in the LILAA Persistence Study

| Sample | Definition | Period When Sample Was Identified | Sample Size | How Sample Was Used |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Program Participants** | All adult learners with at least 1 hour of activity in a LILAA program | January 2000 through December 2001. For some sites, data collection started later or ended earlier. | 4,206 | To describe the characteristics of adult learners served by LILAA programs |
| **Program Entrants: Short Follow-Up** | New or returning participants (i.e., those who became active in a program after at least 3 months of inactivity) with at least 6 months of up data by December 2001 | January 2000 through June 2001. Wakefield, where data collection started late, and Flushing, where data collection stopped early, are slightly underrepresented in this sample. | 2,110 | To describe patterns of participation in the initial 6 months after entrance into the program |
| **Program Entrants: Extended Follow-Up** | New or returning participants with at least 18 months of data by December 2001 (or at least 12 months of data in Greensboro, Oakland, and Wakefield) | January 2000 through July 2000, except in late-starting sites of Greensboro, Oakland, and Wakefield, where participants starting as late as January 2001 were also included. Nonetheless, Wakefield is still substantially underrepresented in this sample. | 1,256 | To describe early patterns of participation over an extended period after entrance into the program |
| **Achievement Study Participants: Wave I** | Students from Oakland, Redwood City, NYPL, or QBPL sites who volunteered to take a battery of literacy tests and complete a short survey | Tests were administered between January 2001 and January 2002. | 250 (199 for the survey) | To describe the literacy levels of students in the LILAA programs and to describe students' perspectives on their literacy and learning |

Appendix C

# Issues Related to Capturing Student Persistence Using Attendance Record Data

Chapter 3 in this report discusses challenges that the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) programs have faced in collecting and managing data for this persistence study and for tracking students' participation patterns. These challenges — related to respecting students' privacy, collecting information for tutors, capturing time spent in independent learning activities, and issues centering on technological capacity and accuracy — all have implications for the interpretation of the findings presented in this report. In particular, Chapter 2, which presents an analysis of students' characteristics and their persistence, refers readers to this appendix in discussions related to the samples of program entrants: the short follow-up sample and the extended follow-up sample. This appendix gives readers a better understanding of the challenges related to analyzing the quantitative data on students' characteristics and participation patterns as collected by the LILAA programs in this study, and it speaks to the reliability of the statistical analyses presented in this report. These analytical challenges are likely to arise in many other literacy and education programs, which can learn from the LILAA programs' experiences.

## Missing Data

Because of the many challenges that the LILAA programs face in collecting and managing data for the persistence study, it is inevitable that some student participation will not be captured in the data provided for the evaluation. Despite such underreporting, however, the data can still reveal valuable trends in participation patterns at each program. Because the data for this report cover a long period of time (from January 2000 to December 2001), periodic lapses in entering data on students' attendance will not invalidate the larger picture of their persistence. Also, although data are likely missing, it can usually be assumed that they will be missing at a relatively consistent level over time, because the programs tend to be faced with the same set of challenges. Therefore, trends over time reveal trends in participation.

In the fall of 2001, the researchers started to review program data regularly, often on a monthly basis. This allows the researchers to analyze trends as they occur, to review the findings with program staff, and to check whether the findings reveal actual trends or a change in the site's data collection and entry methods. The ongoing review of data also allows program staff to see trends in persistence and to consider the site's interventions in this light. Therefore, if the programs improve their data collection, the researchers can take this into account in interpreting the data.

Finally, because of quality control problems during the early stages of data collection, it is possible that overreporting also occurred.

## Consistency of Measures Across Programs

Although this report does not make comparisons of trends across programs, it is still useful to have some consistency across programs, so that the programs can be discussed in the same way. For example, it is important to ensure that when a student is termed "active" in a library literacy program, this means the same thing regardless of which program is involved. Such a definition may differ from the operational definitions used by the programs themselves. For example, staff at some programs may consider a student active if the student has not told a staff member that he or she is dropping out or if the student has remained informally connected to the program but has not actually attended and participated. Other programs may consider a student active only if the student has participated in an activity during a given time period. However, the research team needs to find a way to define "active" so that it has the same meaning throughout the study. This may result in the researchers' finding different trends (or numbers of students being served) than the programs themselves find. For the purposes of this study, active status is determined by the hours entered for students; thus, if a students has any hours, for any activity, entered in the database, that student is considered active for the given time period.

Similarly, it is important to have common definitions for such terms as "program entry," "program exit," "employment," "goal achievement," and so on. Throughout this study, the researchers have been cognizant that definitions may differ from program to program, and they have taken great care either to create a common definition or to make sure that different definitions are identified as such. Also, some programs may not collect attendance information for all the literacy activities they offer. For example, some programs collect data on students' time spent in the library doing personal research and reading, while other programs do not. Although this study does not compare programs, it is still important to realize that "participation" can mean different things at different sites.

## What the Data Do Not Capture

The literacy programs in the LILAA persistence study have set up their database systems to collect participation data for some or all of the literacy activities they offer — including class and group instruction, pair-tutoring, individual activities, and sometimes such "extracurricular" activities such as field trips, art programs, and family events. However, in addition to the challenges of collecting attendance data for all these activities, there are a number of other literacy activities that program staff cannot quantify and include in any of the data. For example, students' time spent doing homework, reading on their own at home, or engaging in conversation with their classmates is very important to success in achieving literacy, but no data reflect such activities, which are also a key part of persistence in literacy learning. However, it is assumed that students enroll in the library literacy programs because they can benefit from the assistance and support that these programs offer. Therefore, analyzing persistence in participa-

tion at the library programs alone is very valuable. Moreover, many of the literacy activities that students pursue on their own time are often a result of participating in a literacy program.

In addition to this study's limitations in measuring individual literacy activities, its quantitative analyses (and the programs' databases) are not designed to capture many other aspects of students' lives that are relevant to their literacy experiences. For example, the data do not track students' employment histories after intake; they do not follow outcomes for their families and children; and they do not capture students' educational progress after they leave the literacy programs (with the exception of students who are included in the achievement study). The researchers also do not consistently have information on the educational attainment level of students. Most important, in most cases they do not have data on why students leave library literacy programs. Thus, the assessment of both the programs and the students they serve is necessarily limited.

In sum, collecting and managing data on who students are and just how they are spending their time in literacy programs is a substantial challenge for libraries. It requires a lot of staff time to implement processes for tracking attendance; to follow up with instructors, tutors, and students; to set up and learn new software; and to enter large amounts of data into the system. And with the added challenges of privacy concerns and noncompliance of tutors and students, there is always a large possibility that not all data are being recorded. However, despite missing information and other limitations, the data collected for this study allow for valuable and valid analyses of student persistence. These data may not suffice for giving accurate counts of the total number of students participating in each of the LILAA programs, but analyzing the data in the aggregate and over a long period of time allows for analyses of individual and program trends in participation that reveal important observations about persistence.

Appendix D

# The Achievement Study Component of the LILAA Persistence Study

## The Design of the Achievement Study

Within the larger context of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) persistence study, the achievement study component was designed to provide the opportunity to learn about:

- The literacy level of students in the LILAA programs
- How achievement improves as students spend more time in the programs
- How achievement progresses after students leave the programs

The design involves measuring student achievement at two points in time, approximately 12 months apart, with a battery of literacy tests. The literacy levels reported in Chapter 2 of this report are based on findings from the first point in time. To the extent possible, all the students who participated in the first wave of the tests have been tracked and retested, regardless of whether they remained active in their LILAA program. The results of these tests are being supplemented with in-depth qualitative interviews of a subsample of these students, to capture (1) the extent of participation in literacy activities inside and outside the library literacy programs and (2) students' perceptions of changes in their literacy levels.

## The Tests Used in the Achievement Study

The battery of tests selected for the achievement study consists of instruments that are all considered program-based and learner-centered, and they all focus on the learning process as program outcomes. Most important, these tests rely on different procedures for different students, making them more appropriate for each individual and thus more meaningful and valid. These tests are reputable, standardized tests that are used nationally, which allows for library literacy programs to be assessed among other adult education providers, giving them an equal base of comparison. This is the first time that a battery of standardized tests has been given specifically to a cohort of library literacy programs within a systematic study of them. The tests are described below.

1. The **Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE),** published by Pro-Ed, measures reading rate and word recognition. Reading rate and word recognition are important predictors of reading comprehension. (Someone who reads too slowly loses the meaning of long and complicated sentences.) The TOWRE consists of two subtests:

- The **Sight Word Efficiency (SWE)** subtest measures the number of printed words that can be correctly identified within 45 seconds.
- The **Phonemic Decoding Efficiency (PDE)** subtest measures the number of pronounceable words that the test-taker can decode in 45 seconds.[1]

2. The **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)** measures vocabulary skills, assessing both verbal and auditory attainment of Standard English. It is a measure of listening and reading vocabulary. The test can be administered to persons of any age. Test-takers are asked to select pictures that best match the meaning of words that are read aloud by the person administering the test.[2]

3. The **Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)** test measures several skills, including reading comprehension (only the reading comprehension part is used in this study). For the reading comprehension subtest, test-takers are presented with signs and short reading passages about the day-to-day lives of adults. The passages are followed by questions that test comprehension of the text and the ability to make inferences. The test has three levels: Level 1 is for adults with one to four years of education (primary schooling); Level 2 is for adults with five to eight years of schooling (intermediate schooling); and Level 3 is for adults who have had at least eight years of schooling but who have not graduated from high school.[3]

4. The **Basic English Skills Test (BEST)** is a special test for students of English as a Second Language (ESL); it measures English speaking and listening skills. It is designed to measure competency-based listening comprehension, speaking, and elementary reading and writing skills. Test-takers are presented with a series of real-life listening and speaking tasks, such as telling time, paying for a store item, and giving and receiving directions.[4] Only those sample members who are learners of English (57 students) took the BEST. See Appendix Table D.1.

Though the achievement tests reported in Figure 2.2 were selected to measure different literacy outcomes, some of the differences in achievement levels across the tests are

[1]Torgesen, Wagner, and Rashotte, 1999.
[2]Dunn and Dunn, 1997.
[3]Karlsen and Gardner, 1986.
[4]Center for Applied Linguistics, 1989.

notable. The most highly correlated tests are the ABLE and the TOWRE,[5] as would be expected, because the rate of word recognition (as measured by the TOWRE) is an important predictor of reading comprehension (as measured by the ABLE). The absence of correlation between the PPVT and the other tests may suggest that the vocabulary skills measured by the PPVT are distinct and surprisingly unrelated to the other literacy skills as measured with this battery of tests.

[5]There is a statistically significant correlation coefficient of .51 between the ABLE and the TOWRE SWE subtest, and there is a statistically significant correlation coefficient of .45 between the ABLE and the TOWRE PDE subtest.

The LILAA Persistence Study

## Appendix Table D.1

## Performance Levels on the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) for English Language Learners

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **0.** No ability whatsoever. | No ability whatsoever. | No ability whatsoever. | No ability whatsoever. | No ability whatsoever. | 0-8 |
| **I.** Functions minimally, if at all, in English.<br><br>Can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication and in which all tasks can be easily demonstrated.<br><br>A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers can rarely communicate with a person at this level except through gestures. | Understands only a few isolated words, and extremely simple learned phrases. (What's your name?) | Vocabulary limited to a few isolated words.<br><br>No control of grammar. | Recognizes most letters of the alphabet and single-digit numbers. | Copies letters of the alphabet, numbers, own name and address; needs assistance. | 9-15 |
| **II.** Functions in a very limited way in situations related to immediate needs.<br><br>Can handle only routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication, and in which all talks can be easily demonstrated.<br><br>A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have great difficulty communicating with a person at this level. | Understands a limited number of very simple learned phrases, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions. | Expresses a limited number of immediate survival needs using very simple learned phrases.<br><br>Ask and responds to very simple learned questions.<br><br>Some control of very basic grammar. | Recognizes letters of the alphabet, numbers 1-100, and a few very common sight words (such as name, address, stop). | Writes letters of the alphabet, numbers 1-100, very basic personal info. On simplified forms, needs assistance. | 16-28 |

(continued)

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## Appendix Table D.1 (continued)

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **III.** Functions with some difficulty in situations related to immediate needs.<br><br>Can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve only the most basic oral communication and in which all tasks can be demonstrated.<br><br>A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have great difficulty communicating with a person at this level. | Understands simple learned phrases, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions. | Expresses immediate survival needs using simple learned phrases.<br><br>Asks and responds to simple learned questions.<br><br>Some control of very basic grammar. | Reads and understands a limited number of common sight words and short, simple learned phrases related to immediate needs. | Writes a limited number of very common words and basic personal info. On simplified forms, needs assistance. | 29-41 |
| **IV.** Can satisfy basic survival needs and a few very routine social demands.<br><br>Can handle entry-level jobs that involve some simple oral communication, but in which talks can also be demonstrated.<br><br>A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have difficulty communicating with a person at this level. | Understands simple learned phrases easily and some simple new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with frequent repetitions. | Expresses basic survival needs, including asking and responding to related questions using both learned and limited number of new phrases.<br><br>Participates in basic conversations in a few very routine social situations (for example, greeting, inviting).<br><br>Speaks with hesitation and frequent pauses.<br><br>Some control of basic grammar. | Reads and understands simple learned sentences and some new sentences related to immediate needs; frequent misinterpretations. | Writes common words and simple phrases related to immediate needs; makes frequent errors and needs assistance. | 42-50 |

(continued)

## Appendix Table D.1 (continued)

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| V. Can satisfy basic survival needs and some limited social demands.<br><br>Can handle jobs and job training that involve following simple oral and very basic written instructions but for which most tasks can also be demonstrated.<br><br>A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have some difficulty communicating with a person at this level. | Understands learned phrases easily and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with repetition.<br><br>Has limited ability to understand on the telephone. | Functions independently in most fact-to-face basic survival situations but needs some help.<br><br>Asks and responds to direct questions on familiar and some unfamiliar subjects.<br><br>Still relies on learned phrases but also uses new phrases (that is, speaks with some creativity) but with some hesitation and pauses.<br><br>Communicates on the phone to express a limited number of survival needs, but with some difficulty.<br><br>Participates in basic conversations in a limited number of social situations.<br><br>Can occasionally clarify general meaning by simple rewording.<br><br>Increasing, but inconsistent, control of basic grammar. | Reads and understands some short simplified materials related to basic needs with some misinterpretations. | Writes phrases and some short, simple sentences; completes simplified forms.<br><br>Makes some errors; needs assistance. | 51-57 |

(continued)





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## Appendix Table D.1 (continued)

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **VI.** Can satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands.<br><br>Can handle jobs and job training that involve following simple oral and written instructions and diagrams.<br><br>A native English speaker not used to dealing with limited English speakers will be able to communicate with a person at this level on familiar topics, but with difficulty and some effort. | Understands conversations containing some unfamiliar vocabulary on many everyday subjects, with a need for repetition, rewording, or slower speech.<br><br>Has some ability to understand without face-to-face contact (for example, on the telephone, TV) | Functions independently in most survival situations, but needs some help.<br><br>Relies less on learned phrases; speaks with creativity, but with hesitation.<br><br>Communicates on the phone on familiar subjects, but with some difficulty.<br><br>Participates with some confidence in social situations when addressed directly.<br><br>Can sometimes clarify general meaning by rewording.<br><br>Control of basic grammar is evident but inconsistent; may attempt to use more difficult grammar but with almost no control. | Reads and understands simplified materials on familiar subjects.<br><br>May attempt to read some nonsimplified materials (for example, a notice from the gas company) but needs a great deal of assistance. | Performs basic writing tasks in a familiar context including short personal notes and letters (for example, to a teacher or landlord).<br><br>Makes some errors; may need assistance | 58-64 |

(continued)

## Appendix Table D.1 (continued)

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **VII.** Can satisfy survival needs and routine work and social demands.<br><br>Can handle work that involves following oral and simple written instructions in familiar and some unfamiliar situations.<br><br>A native English speaker not used to dealing with limited English speakers can generally communicate with a person at this level of familiar topics. | Understands conversations on most everyday subjects at normal speed when addressed directly; may need repetition, rewording, or slower speech.<br><br>Understands routine work-related conversations.<br><br>Increasing ability to understand without face-to-face contact (telephone, TV, radio).<br><br>Has difficulty following conversation between native speakers. | Functions independently in survival and many social and work situations, but may need help occasionally.<br><br>Communicates on the phone on familiar subjects.<br><br>Expands on basic ideas in conversation, but still speaks with hesitation while searching for appropriate vocabulary and grammar.<br><br>Clarifies general meaning easily, and can sometimes convey exact meaning.<br><br>Controls basic grammar, but not more difficult grammar. | Reads and partially understands some nonsimplified materials on everyday subjects; needs assistance. | Performs routine writing talks within a familiar context.<br><br>Makes some errors; may need assistance. | 65+ |

(continued)

## Appendix Table D.1 (continued)

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **VIII.** Can participate effectively in social and familiar work situations.<br><br>A native English speaker not used to dealing with limited English speakers can communicate with a person at this level on almost all topics. | Understands general conversation and conversation on technical subjects in own field.<br><br>Understands without face-to-face contact (telephone, TV, radio); may have difficulty following rapid or colloquial speech.<br><br>Understands most conversation between native speakers; may miss details if speech is very rapid or colloquial or if subject is unfamiliar. | Participates effectively in practical and social conversation and in technical discussions in own field.<br><br>Speaks fluently in both familiar and unfamiliar situations; can handle problem situations.<br><br>Conveys and explains exact meaning of complex ideas.<br><br>Good control of grammar. | Reads and understands most nonsimplified materials including materials in own field. | Performs writing tasks with reasonable accuracy to meet social and basic work needs. | |
| **IX.** Can participate fluently and accurately in practical, social, and work situations.<br><br>A native English speaker not used to dealing with limited English speakers can communicate easily with a person at this level. | Understands almost all speech in any context. Occasionally is confused by highly colloquial or regional speech. | Approximates a native speaker's fluency and ability to convey own ideas precisely, even in unfamiliar situations.<br><br>Speaks without effort.<br><br>Has excellent control of grammar with no apparent patterns of weakness. | Reads nonsimplified materials. | Approximates a native speaker's ability to write accurately. | |

(continued)

## Appendix Table D.1 (continued)

| General Language Ability | Listening Comprehension | Oral Communication | Reading | Writing | BEST Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| X. Has ability equal to that of a native speaker of the same socioeconomic level. | Has ability equal to that of a native speaker of the same socioeconomic level. | Has ability equal to that of a native speaker of the same socioeconomic level. | Has ability equal to that of a native speaker of the same socioeconomic level. | Has ability equal to that of a native speaker of the same socioeconomic level. | |

SOURCE: Center for Applied Linguistics. 1989. "Student Performance Level Document." *Basic English Skills Test: Test Manual.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [Based on Office of Refugee Resettlement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). 1985. *Competency-Based Mainstream English Language Training Project (MELT) Resource Package.* Washington, DC: Author.]

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# Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. With a few exceptions, this list includes reports published by MDRC since 1999. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org), from which copies of MDRC's publications can also be downloaded.

## Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

### Next Generation Project

A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several other leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

*How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research.* 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.

*How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Employment and Income: A Synthesis of Research.* 2001. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos.

*How Welfare and Work Policies for Parents Affect Adolescents: A Synthesis of Research.* 2002. Lisa Gennetian, Greg Duncan, Virginia Knox, Wanda Vargas, Elizabeth Clark-Kauffman, Andrew London.

### ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

*After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States.* 1997. Dan Bloom.

*Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform.* 1997. Amy Brown.

*Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform.* 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

*Promoting Participation: How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities.* 1999. Gayle Hamilton, Susan Scrivener.

*Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs.* 2000. Gordon Berlin.

*Steady Work and Better Jobs: How to Help Low-Income Parents Sustain Employment and Advance in the Workforce.* 2000. Julie Strawn, Karin Martinson.

*Beyond Work First: How to Help Hard-to-Employ Individuals Get Jobs and Succeed in the Workforce.* 2001. Amy Brown.

### Project on Devolution and Urban Change

A multiyear study in four major urban counties — Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the city of Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia — that examines how welfare reforms are being implemented and affect poor people, their neighborhoods, and the institutions that serve them.

*Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change.* 1999. Janet Quint, Kathryn Edin, Maria Buck, Barbara Fink, Yolanda Padilla, Olis Simmons-Hewitt, Mary Valmont.

*Food Security and Hunger in Poor, Mother-Headed Families in Four U.S. Cities.* 2000. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

*Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations.* 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Johannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

*Post-TANF Food Stamp and Medicaid Benefits: Factors That Aid or Impede Their Receipt.* 2001. Janet Quint, Rebecca Widom.

*Social Service Organizations and Welfare Reform.* 2001. Barbara Fink, Rebecca Widom.

*Monitoring Outcomes for Cuyahoga County's Welfare Leavers: How Are They Faring?* 2001. Nandita Verma, Claudia Coulton.

*The Health of Poor Urban Women: Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change.* 2001. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

*Is Work Enough? The Experiences of Current and Former Welfare Mothers Who Work.* 2001. Denise Polit, Rebecca Widom, Kathryn Edin, Stan Bowie, Andrew London, Ellen Scott, Abel Valenzuela.

*Readying Welfare Recipients for Work: Lessons from Four Big Cities as They Implement Welfare Reform.* 2002. Thomas Brock, Laura Nelson, Megan Reiter.

*Welfare Reform in Cleveland: Implementation, Effects, and Experiences of Poor Families and Neighborhoods.* 2002. Thomas Brock, Claudia Coulton, Andrew London, Denise Polit, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Ellen Scott, Nandita Verma.



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*Comparing Outcomes for Los Angeles County's HUD-Assisted and Unassisted CalWORKs Leavers*. 2003. Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

*Monitoring Outcomes for Los Angeles County's Pre- and Post-CalWORKs Leavers: How Are They Faring?* 2003. Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

### Wisconsin Works

This study examines how Wisconsin's welfare-to-work program, one of the first to end welfare as an entitlement, is administered in Milwaukee.

*Complaint Resolution in the Context of Welfare Reform: How W-2 Settles Disputes*. 2001. Suzanne Lynn.

*Exceptions to the Rule: The Implementation of 24-Month Time-Limit Extensions in W-2*. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle.

*Matching Applicants with Services: Initial Assessments in the Milwaukee County W-2 Program*. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle, Ben Glispie.

### Employment Retention and Advancement Project

Conceived and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), this demonstration project is aimed at testing various ways to help low-income people find, keep, and advance in jobs.

*New Strategies to Promote Stable Employment and Career Progression: An Introduction to the Employment Retention and Advancement Project* (HHS). 2002. Dan Bloom, Jacquelyn Anderson, Melissa Wavelet, Karen Gardiner, Michael Fishman.

## *Time Limits*

*Welfare Time Limits: State Policies, Implementation, and Effects on Families*. 2002. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, Barbara Fink.

*Leavers, Stayers, and Cyclers: An Analysis of the Welfare Caseload*. 2002. Cynthia Miller.

### Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

*The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program*. 1999. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James Kemple, Nandita Verma.

*The Family Transition Program: Final Report on Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program*. 2000. Dan Bloom, James Kemple, Pamela Morris, Susan Scrivener, Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

### Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

*Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card*. 1999. Dan Bloom.

### Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

*Connecticut Post-Time Limit Tracking Study: Six-Month Survey Results*. 1999. Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Dan Bloom.

*Jobs First: Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative*. 2000. Dan Bloom, Laura Melton, Charles Michalopoulos, Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

*Connecticut's Jobs First Program: An Analysis of Welfare Leavers*. 2000. Laura Melton, Dan Bloom.

*Final Report on Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative*. 2002. Dan Bloom, Susan Scrivener, Charles Michalopoulos, Pamela Morris, Richard Hendra, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Johanna Walter.

### Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

*Forty-Two-Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project*. 1999. Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

*WRP: Key Findings from the Forty-Two-Month Client Survey*. 2000. Dan Bloom, Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

*WRP: Final Report on Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project*. 2002. Susan Scrivener, Richard Hendra, Cindy Redcross, Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter.

## *Financial Incentives*

*Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs*. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

### Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

*Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program*. 2000:

*Volume 1: Effects on Adults*. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Lisa Gennetian, Martey Dodoo, Jo Anna Hunter, Cindy Redcross.
*Volume 2: Effects on Children*. Lisa Gennetian, Cynthia Miller.

*Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program*. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Lisa Gennetian.

*Final Report on the Implementation and Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program in Ramsey County*. 2000. Patricia Auspos, Cynthia Miller, Jo Anna Hunter.

### New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

*New Hope for People with Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare*. 1999. Johannes Bos, Aletha Huston, Robert Granger, Greg Duncan, Thomas Brock, Vonnie McLoyd.

### Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

*Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? The Effect of Adding Services to the Self-Sufficiency Project's Financial Incentives* (SRDC). 1999. Gail Quets, Philip Robins, Elsie Pan, Charles Michalopoulos, David Card.

*When Financial Work Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study* (SRDC). 1999. Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins, David Card.

*The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects of a Financial Work Incentive on Employment and Income* (SRDC). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, David Card, Lisa Gennetian, Kristen Harknett, Philip K. Robins.

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*Making Work Pay: Final Report on the Self-Sufficiency Project for Long-Term Welfare Recipients* (SRDC). 2002. Charles Michalopoulos, Doug Tattrie, Cynthia Miller, Philip Robins, Pamela Morris, David Gyarmati, Cindy Redcross, Kelly Foley, Reuben Ford.

## *Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs*

### National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

*Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies* (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

*Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs* (HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, JoAnn Rock, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Amanda Schweder, Laura Storto.

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*What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup* (HHS/ED). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Christine Schwartz.

*Evaluating Two Approaches to Case Management: Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Three-Year Impacts of the Columbus Welfare-to-Work Program* (HHS/ED). 2001. Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

*How Effective Are Different Welfare-to-Work Approaches? Five-Year Adult and Child Impacts for Eleven Programs – Executive Summary* (HHS/ED). 2001. Gayle Hamilton, Stephen Freedman, Lisa Gennetian, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Anna Gassman-Pines, Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Surjeet Ahluwalia, Jennifer Brooks.

*Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies* (HHS/ED). 2002. Gayle Hamilton.

**Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program**
An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

*The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts.* 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

*The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First Program in a Major Urban Center.* 2000. Stephen Freedman, Jean Knab, Lisa Gennetian, David Navarro.

### *Teen Parents on Welfare*

*Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD).* 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

**Ohio's LEAP Program**
An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

*LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents.* 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

**New Chance Demonstration**
A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

*New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children.* 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

*Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study.* 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

**Center for Employment Training Replication**
This study is testing whether the successful results for youth of a training program developed in San Jose can be replicated in 12 other sites around the country.

*Evaluation of the Center for Employment Training Replication Sites: Interim Report* (Berkeley Policy Associates). 2000. Stephen Walsh, Deana Goldsmith, Yasuyo Abe, Andrea Cann.

### *Focusing on Fathers*

**Parents' Fair Share Demonstration**
A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

*Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood* (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

*Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement.* 2000. Virginia Knox, Cindy Redcross.

*Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment.* 2000. John M. Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

*The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum.* 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

*The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share.* 2001. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox.

## Career Advancement and Wage Progression

**Opening Doors to Earning Credentials**
An exploration of strategies for increasing low-wage workers' access to and completion of community college programs.

*Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers.* 2001. Susan Golonka, Lisa Matus-Grossman.

*Welfare Reform and Community Colleges: A Policy and Research Context.* 2002. Thomas Brock, Lisa Matus-Grossman, Gayle Hamilton.

*Opening Doors: Students' Perspectives on Juggling Work, Family, and College.* 2002. Lisa Matus-Grossman, Susan Gooden.

*Opening Doors: Supporting CalWORKs Students at California Community Colleges: An Exploratory Focus Group Study.* 2002. Laura Nelson, Rogéair Purnell.

## Education Reform

### Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

*Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships*. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

*Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School*. 2000. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

*Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Initial Transitions to Post-Secondary Education and Employment*. 2001. James Kemple.

### First Things First

This demonstration and research project looks at First Things First, a whole-school reform that combines a variety of best practices aimed at raising achievement and graduation rates in both urban and rural settings.

*Scaling Up First Things First: Site Selection and the Planning Year*. 2002. Janet Quint.

### Closing Achievement Gaps

Conducted for the Council of the Great City Schools, this study identifies districtwide approaches to urban school reform that appear to raise overall student performance while reducing achievement gaps among racial groups.

*Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. 2002. Jason Snipes, Fred Doolittle, Corinne Herlihy.

### Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

*Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark*. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

### Accelerated Schools

This study examines the implementation and impacts on achievement of the Accelerated Schools model, a whole-school reform targeted at at-risk students.

*Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Approach: A Look at Early Implementation and Impacts on Student Achievement in Eight Elementary Schools*. 2001. Howard Bloom, Sandra Ham, Laura Melton, Julienne O'Brien.

### Extended-Service Schools Initiative

Conducted in partnership with Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), this evaluation of after-school programs operated as part of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative examines the programs' implementation, quality, cost, and effects on students.

*Multiple Choices After School: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative* (P/PV). 2002. Jean Baldwin Grossman, Marilyn Price, Veronica Fellerath, Linda Jucovy, Lauren Kotloff, Rebecca Raley, Karen Walker.

### School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

*Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work* (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

*Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs*. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

### Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

*Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed*. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

### Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

*Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools*. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

## Employment and Community Initiatives

### Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multisite effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

*Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration*. 1999. James Riccio.

*Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration*. 1999. Howard Bloom.

*Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: An Early Look at Program Implementation.* 2000. Edited by Susan Philipson Bloom with Susan Blank.

*Building New Partnerships for Employment: Collaboration Among Agencies and Public Housing Residents in the Jobs-Plus Demonstration.* 2001. Linda Kato, James Riccio.

*Making Work Pay for Public Housing Residents: Financial-Incentive Designs at Six Jobs-Plus Demonstration Sites.* 2002. Cynthia Miller, James Riccio.

*The Special Challenges of Offering Employment Programs in Culturally Diverse Communities: The Jobs-Plus Experience in Public Housing Developments.* 2002. Linda Kato.

*The Employment Experiences of Public Housing Residents: Findings from the Jobs-Plus Baseline Survey.* 2002. John Martinez.

*Children in Public Housing Developments: An Examination of the Children at the Beginning of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration.* 2002. Pamela Morris, Stephanie Jones.

*Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: Key Features of Mature Employment Programs in Seven Public Housing Communities.* 2003. Linda Kato.

### Neighborhood Jobs Initiative

An initiative to increase employment in a number of low-income communities.

*The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: An Early Report on the Vision and Challenges of Bringing an Employment Focus to a Community-Building Initiative.* 2001. Frieda Molina, Laura Nelson.

*Structures of Opportunity: Developing the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in Fort Worth, Texas.* 2002. Tony Proscio.

### Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

*Designing and Administering a Wage-Paying Community Service Employment Program Under TANF: Some Considerations and Choices.* 1999. Kay Sherwood.

*San Francisco Works: Toward an Employer-Led Approach to Welfare Reform and Workforce Development.* 2000. Steven Bliss.

### Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of unemployment insurance.

*Testing a Re-Employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project.* 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

## MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

*Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration.* 1999. Howard Bloom.

*Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series.* 1999. Howard Bloom.

*Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs.* 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

*The Politics of Random Assignment: Implementing Studies and Impacting Policy.* 2000. Judith Gueron.

*Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations.* 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Joannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

*Measuring the Impacts of Whole School Reforms: Methodological Lessons from an Evaluation of Accelerated Schools.* 2001. Howard Bloom.

*A Meta-Analysis of Government Sponsored Training Programs.* 2001. David Greenberg, Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins.

*Modeling the Performance of Welfare-to-Work Programs: The Effects of Program Management and Services, Economic Environment, and Client Characteristics.* 2001. Howard Bloom, Carolyn Hill, James Riccio.

*A Regression-Based Strategy for Defining Subgroups in a Social Experiment.* 2001. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

*Explaining Variation in the Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs*. 2001. David Greenberg, Robert Meyer, Charles Michalopoulos, Michael Wiseman.

*Extending the Reach of Randomized Social Experiments: New Directions in Evaluations of American Welfare-to-Work and Employment Initiatives*. 2001. James Riccio, Howard Bloom.

*Can Nonexperimental Comparison Group Methods Match the Findings from a Random Assignment Evaluation of Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs?* 2002. Howard Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Carolyn Hill, Ying Lei.

*Using Instrumental Variables Analysis to Learn More from Social Policy Experiments*. 2002. Lisa Gennetian, Johannes Bos, Pamela Morris.

*Using Place-Based Random Assignment and Comparative Interrupted Time-Series Analysis to Evaluate the Jobs-Plus Employment Program for Public Housing Residents*. 2002. Howard Bloom, James Riccio.

## About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.

MDRC

16 East 34th Street
New York, NY 10016
(212) 532-3200

www.mdrc.org

475 14th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 663-6372

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